PERCEIVED PARENTAL AUTONOMY SUPPORT AND INTENTION TO BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

MARY A. FALEKE and OLANREWAJU A. IPINMOROTI

Department of Human Kinetics & Health Education Tai Solarin University of Education Ijebu Ode, Nigeria.
falekema@tasued.edu.ng.

Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate perceived parental autonomy support and intention to be physically active. The participants were 248 students (152 males and 76 females) aged between 10 and 19 years (mean = 14.1years, SD = 2.13) from five co – educational secondary schools. They were selected through simple random sampling technique using fish bowl technique with replacement. After obtaining clearance from the school authority, the researcher and the researcher assistants sought for the cooperation of the school Physical Education teacher who gathered the students in a classroom. The purpose of the research was explained to the students and those who volunteered to take part were given the questionnaires to fill. The students were told that they were not under any compulsion to participate and as a result, they could withdraw if they chose to do so. The questionnaires were completed anonymously to protect the confidentiality of the students. The two instruments used were: The perceptions of parents Scales (POPS) developed by Grolnick, Deci & Ryan (1997) and Intention to be physically active outside of school by Ajzen & Fishbeing,1980) were adapted for use. Descriptive statistics were computed to analyse the bio data. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine gender differences in the secondary school students' intention to be physically active outside school. Thereafter, the Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient was computed to examine the relationship between parental autonomy support of fathers and mothers, while linear regression analysis was computed to determine whether perceived parental autonomy predicts intention to be physically active outside school. Results showed there was no significant gender difference in intention to be physically active outside school. There was significant relationship between parental (father and mother) autonomy support and intention to be physically active outside school. Both fathers' and mothers' autonomy supports were significant predictors of secondary school students' intention to be physically active outside school.

Keywords: Father Autonomy support, Mother autonomy support, physical activity, intention, secondary school, outside school.

Introduction

Over the past 50 years, there has been a huge shift from a lifestyle that was physically active then to a lifestyle which is predominantly sedentary today (WHO, 2004). According to Seah and Hashim (2014) a greater percentage of Malaysian adolescents were low to moderate levels of physical activity. Younger participants tend to have significantly higher levels of physical activity compared to older adolescents. This is in line with earlier studies which reported that young people in many countries, including Nigeria, are consistently reporting low levels of physical activity (Armstrong, 1989; Dishman, 1994; Wang, Chia, Quek, Ipinmoroti, 2004; & Liu, 2006). Taylor, Blair, Cummings, Wun, and Malina (1999) opined that adolescents' inactivity or negative experiences with physical activity track into adulthood and greatly impede the probability of them becoming physically inactive adults. A physically active lifestyle in adulthood may originate from active lifestyle in one's adolescent years (Trudeau, 2000). It has been observed that people are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to do an activity simply for the enjoyment they derive from it, when they can freely choose to pursue an activity (i.e. autonomy), when they master the activity (i.e. competence) and when they feel connected and supported by significant others (i.e. relatedness) (Gagne, 2003).

Research has shown that when individuals experience autonomous reasons for participating in an activity, persistence and adherence to that activity are manifested (Lin & Wang, 2009; Almagro, Saenz – Lpoez, & Morenzo, 2010). However, less determined motivation outcomes are achieved when individuals perceive controlling actions in an activity. Within the Self Determination Theory (SDT), autonomy is defined as the degree to which behaviours are enacted with a sense of volition. Highly autonomous or self–determined adolescents fully endorse the actions in which they engage and stand behind their actions. They are self–governing because they base their actions on awareness of personal interests and abiding values and goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan, 2007).

The postulation that experiencing a sense of autonomy and choice fulness in one's action is critical for people's optimal functioning has been confirmed by many studies in various dimension of life (Deci & Ryan, 2000, Ryan & Deci, 2002; Verlland, 1997). In the sport setting, autonomy support happens when a significant other takes the target's perspective, provides choice, reflects the target's feeling and encourages the target's initiative. When a person feels more autonomous, he/she exerts less efforts than when he/she feels forced to exert self–control by external conditions (Pagaduan, Kritz, Wilson, & Palmeria, 2011). It is line with the foregoing that Parental autonomy support has been defined as parents' promotion of adolescent independent expression, thinking and decision making (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Parental autonomy support reflects a method of interaction where the use of control and coercion is minimized, the viewpoint of the adolescent is considered and exploration of the adolescent's own interest is encouraged (Soerens, Vansteenkistes, & Lens, 2007; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Parents who are autonomy supportive provide options and meaningful justification during decision making and are empathetic to the youth's position (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick & Leone DR, 1994; Deci & Ryan, 2002). Adolescents who perceive their parents as autonomy supportive regarding physical activity are more likely to internalize and thus demonstrate greater self – self-determination towards physical activity during leisure time than those who perceive their parents as less autonomy-supportive (Hagger, Chartzisarantis, &Biddle, 2002).

Grolnick (2003), Soenens and Vansteenkiste (2005) found that self–determined functioning is promoted within a supportive, non–coercive family climate. SDT holds that people have a basic inclination to act in a self–determined fashion, and parents who nurture this adaptive quality should promote their offspring's' well – being (Ryan & Deci, 2002). When a significant other is autonomy supportive, there is the greater likelihood that the need for autonomy-support by the teenager will be more internalized or self–determined in nature (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Morrison, Dashiff and Vance (2013) opined that parental autonomy support remains important to adolescents' internalization of beliefs and attitudes even as they prepare to enter into adulthood. They stated further that although maternal and paternal autonomy support demonstrates significant influence on adolescents, maternal autonomy support was more influential. Few studies have reported separate investigation of maternal and paternal support of autonomy support. This view is corroborated by Robin (1994) who reported that mothers are most often viewed as the most autonomy-supportive parent.

Participation in physical activity starts with an intention to do so. Without an intention to get involved in an activity, there may not be the likelihood of an actual performance of that activity. Intention has been seen as a central construct in the theory of planned behaviour. Azjen (1991) posited that intention is the function of attitude, subjective norms and perceived behaviour control. Studies have shown that intention can predict behaviour for up to 20 – 50% (Godin & Kok, 1996; Hagger, Chartzisarantis, & Biddle,2002). Intentions can be categorized as either autonomous or controlling. Since autonomous intentions predict more behavioural variance than controlling intentions, the development of autonomous intentions should be encouraged in a bid to motivate adherence to physical activity in adolescents. Perceived autonomy support has been found to enhance students' intentions and initiation to be physically active outside school (Lim & Wang, 2009). Seah and Hashim (2014), in a study on psychosocial predictors of physical activity among adolescents in a northern state of Malaysia, reported that there was a positive association between intention and participation in physical activity.

The aim of this study, therefore, was to investigate perceived parental autonomy support and intention to be physically active outside school, to determine whether this intention differs between secondary school boys and girls; and to find out whether parental autonomy support predicts intention to be physically active outside school. To this end, three hypotheses were formulated:

H_01 There will be no significant gender difference in the intention of secondary school students to be physically active outside school.

H_02 Secondary school students in southwestern Nigeria will not perceive their parents to be autonomy-supportive

H_03 There will be no significant relationship between parental autonomy support and secondary school students' intention to be physically active during leisure time.

Methods and Materials

The participants were 248 students (152 males and 76 females) aged between 10 and 19 years (mean = 14.1 years, SD = 2.13) from five co – educational secondary schools. They were selected through a simple random sampling technique using a fish bowl technique with replacement. The data collection was done within the school premises during lunch break. After obtaining clearance from the school authority, the researchers and the researcher assistants sought for the cooperation of the school Physical Education teacher who gathered the students in a classroom. The students were gathered in classrooms and the purpose of the research was explained to them. Those who volunteered to take part were given the questionnaires to fill. The students were told that they were not under any compulsion to participate and as a result they could withdraw if they chose to do so. The questionnaires were completed anonymously to protect the confidentiality of the students.

Measures.

Two instruments were used for the purpose of data collection. The perceptions of parents Scales (POPS) developed by Grolnick, Deci & Ryan (1997) were adapted for use. This questionnaire has 42 items with six subscales (Mother Involvement, Mother Warmth, Mother autonomy support, Father Involvement, Father Warmth and Father autonomy support). Out of the six sub–scales, only the autonomy support subscales – father autonomy support and mother autonomy support were adapted for use. The adaptation involved slightly changing the wording of POPS to suit physical activity context e.g. "my mother listens to my opinion or perspective when I've got a problem about participating in physical activity". Responses were recorded on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 7 (very true).

The intention to be physically active outside school by Ajzen & Madden *(1986)* was used. This contained three items. The first two were "During my leisure time over the next two weeks, I intend to do active sport and/or vigorous activity for at least 30 minutes, 3 days per week". Response ranges from 1 (unlikely) to 7 (very likely). "During the next two weeks, I plan to do active sport/or vigorous physical activity for at least 30 minutes, 3 days per week. Response ranges range from 1 (definitely not) to 7 (definitely). The third item was rated on a continuous open scale that is; "During the next two weeks, I plan to do active sport and/or vigorous physical activity for at least 30 minutes -days per week".

Data Analysis

First, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the internal reliability of the subscales. The coefficients for father autonomy support and mother autonomy support were 0.76 and 0.83 respectively. Descriptive statistics were computed to analyse the demographic information. While Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine gender differences in intention to be physically active outside school. Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient was computed to examine the relationship between parental autonomy support of fathers and mothers, while linear regression analysis was computed to determine whether perceived parental autonomy predicts intention to be physically active outside school.

Results

Table 1: Mean and SD of age, father autonomy support, mother autonomy support and intention to be physically active outside school

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Father Autonomy Support	248	4.2600	1.02250
Mother Autonomy Support	247	4.2527	1.03709
Intention	239	3.7994	1.89790
Age	248	14.1169	2.13284

Table 2. Correlation Age, Gender, Father Autonomy Support, Mother Autonomy Support and Intention to be Physically Active Outside School

		1	2	3	4	5
1 gender	Pearson Correlation	1	-.107	-.041	-.073	.003
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.092	.521	.264	.965
	N	248	248	247	239	248
2.fatherAS	Pearson Correlation	-.107	1	.426(**)	.399(**)	.048
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.092		.000	.000	.449
	N	248	248	247	239	248
3.motherAS	Pearson Correlation	-.041	.426(**)	1	.392(**)	.019
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.521	.000		.000	.761
	N	247	247	247	239	247
4. intention	Pearson Correlation	-.073	.399(**)	.392(**)	1	.049
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.264	.000	.000		.451
	N	239	239	239	239	239
5. age	Pearson Correlation	.003	.048	.019	.049	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.965	.449	.761	.451	
	N	248	248	247	239	248

Table 3. Regression analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Gender	.073	.005	.001	1.89689
Father	.400	.160	.153	1.74707
Mother	.469	.220	.210	1.68643

The results showed that there was no significant gender difference in the intention of the students to be physically active outside of school. There was a significant relationship between father autonomy support and intention to be physically active outside school. Also, there was a significant relationship between mother autonomy support and intention to be physically active outside school (see Table 2). The regression analysis showed that gender was not found to be a significant predictor of the intention of secondary school students to be physically active outside school. The researchers observed that the students reported that the autonomy support of fathers was higher than that of mothers (see Table 1). However, both father autonomy support and mother autonomy support were significant predictors of secondary school students' intention to be physically active outside school (15. % and 21.0% of the variables were explained respectively).

Discussion

The result of the study showed that secondary school students who participated in the study perceived their fathers and mothers to be autonomy-supportive as far as participation in physical activity is concerned. However, they reported that paternal autonomy support was higher than that of maternal. Robbins (1994), Morrison, Dashiff and Vance (2013) had earlier reported that although paternal and maternal autonomy demonstrate significant influence on adolescents, maternal autonomy support was more influential but this is at variance with the finding of the current study. This may be a result of the fact that in Nigeria, males are more involved either overtly or covertly in sports than females. It is very common for men to gather and discuss matters relating to sports while such discussion among females is rare. The current study showed that parental autonomy support predicts the intention to be physically active outside the school.

The result of the current study may be of interest to all stakeholders (parents, teachers, counsellors, siblings) who are concerned with the increasing level of inactivity among teenagers. Many students participate in physical education for several reasons which include government or school policy, influence of friends or just because they want to associate with others. One of the concerns of these researchers is that since such decisions to participate are not self-determined, continuation of

participation after school more often than not, dissipates. The report of parental autonomy support by the participants in this study, however, shows that there is an increased possibility of the teenagers' continued involvement in physical activity after school

Since autonomous intentions predict more behavioural variance than controlling intentions (Lim & Wang, 2009), the development of autonomous intentions should be encouraged in a bid to motivate adherence to physical activity in adolescents. Earlier studies have suggested the need to develop autonomous intention. This, according to the researchers, could be done by letting the students understand the importance of physical activity which will foster identification. When providing the students with a meaningful rationale for physical activity, there should be some expression of empathy or acknowledgement of the students' concerns so that the students feel understood and accepted (Deci & Ryan; Lim & Wang, 2013).

Conclusion

Arising from this study is the fact that secondary school students perceive that their parents are autonomy-supportive. Although their intention to be physically active outside school was not very high, a strong link between parental autonomy support and the intention of secondary school students to be physically active outside of school was also established (see Table 1).

The researchers are of the opinion that adolescents are expected to detach themselves from their parental bonds and become more self–reliant and independent from their pubertal years on. They are also expected to develop their opinion and try to get their ideas across even when others, especially their parents, disagree with them. Adolescents should be allowed to develop in a non – controlling environment in which they can act upon personally endorsed motives. Just as adolescents are encouraged to be more self–reliant in decision-making, parents should make concerted efforts to encourage their offspring to stand on their own feet and act independently.

Follow-up studies should be conducted to establish whether the intention to be physically active outside of school translates into actual behaviour. This is necessary because experience has shown that not all human intentions translate to action or practice. The fact that these students have the intention to be physically active outside school may not mean they actually did so.

Limitations.

The limitation of this study is that the sample size is not high enough to warrant generalisation of the results. More studies with larger sample sizes may need to be conducted to warrant such generalisations. The result of this study was based on self – report from the students. Although the researchers allowed the students to fill the questionnaire forms under the condition of anonymity in other to reduce response bias, the dependability of the outcome is hinged on the extent to which the participants were objective in their responses.

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