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Adherence and well-being in overweight and obese patients referred to an exercise on prescription scheme: A self-determination theory perspective

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Abstract

Objectives: Based on Self-Determination Theory [SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985. Intrinsic motivation and self determination in human behavior. New York: Plenum Press], this study examined differences in perceived autonomy support, psychological need satisfaction, self-determined motivation, exercise behaviour, exercise-related cognitions and general well-being, between overweight/obese individuals who demonstrated greater adherence to an exercise on prescription programme and those who adhered less. In addition, this study explored the motivational sequence embedded in SDT by testing autonomy support as a predictor of psychological need satisfaction, autonomy support and psychological need satisfaction as predictors of the motivational regulations, and autonomy support, psychological need satisfaction and the motivational regulations as predictors of behavioural, cognitive and well-being outcomes.

Method: Before commencing, at 1-month, and upon terminating a 3-month exercise on prescription programme, overweight/obese individuals (N = 49; M Body Mass Index = 38.75) completed a multi-section questionnaire tapping all aforementioned variables. Participants' adherence to the scheme was assessed using attendance records.

Results: Multilevel regression analyses revealed that, at the end of the exercise prescription, those individuals who adhered more reported more self-efficacy to overcome barriers to exercise versus those who adhered less. In addition, those individuals who showed greater adherence demonstrated an increase in relatedness need satisfaction over time. For the whole sample, need satisfaction predicted self-determined

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regulation, and collectively, these constructs corresponded to adaptive exercise related outcomes and general well-being throughout the programme.

Conclusions: Based on the results it appears that exercise on prescription schemes would benefit from creating services that foster self-determination via the facilitation of psychological need satisfaction.

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Keywords: Autonomy support; Psychological need satisfaction; Self-determined motivational regulations; Exercise; Obesity

Introduction

Obesity now constitutes the second highest cause of preventable disability and death in the developed world (House of Commons Health Committee, 2004). Sedentary lifestyles contribute significantly to the prevalence of overweight and obesity (National Audit Office, 2001). Thus, increasing exercise engagement should be one way in which to tackle the so-called ‘obesity epidemic’ (WHO, 1998). To achieve this aim, the motivational determinants of exercise participation need to be delineated.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) appears to hold considerable promise for elucidating the social psychological processes influencing exercise participation. SDT postulates that an autonomy supportive context will foster the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs (i.e., the needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence). When these needs are satisfied, it is assumed that self-determined forms of motivational regulation guide behaviour (i.e., intrinsic motivation and integrated and identified regulation) and adaptive behavioural (e.g., exercise engagement), cognitive (e.g., commitment) and well-being (e.g., vitality) outcomes are postulated to ensue. In contrast, diminished need satisfaction elicits less or non self-determined motivation (i.e., introjected and external regulation and amotivation), which in turn, results in maladaptive outcomes.

Basic needs theory, a sub-theory of Deci and Ryan’s self-determination framework (Deci & Ryan, 1985), specifically points to the role of the psychological needs in promoting optimal experiences and well-being. Notably, basic needs theory postulates that satisfaction of the three needs in people’s immediate situations and in their developmental histories will lead to global well-being and psychological health (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus, if an individual’s needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence are satisfied in exercise and physical activity settings, a sense of overall well-being (e.g., feelings of life satisfaction) or eudaimonia (e.g., subjective vitality) should ensue (see Hagger & Chatzisarantis, this edition, for a more detailed overview of SDT).

Support for SDT in the exercise domain

Previous SDT-focused exercise research has revealed that autonomy support is positively associated with psychological need satisfaction and self-determined regulation of exercise behaviour (e.g., Edmunds, Ntoumanis, & Duda, 2006; Wilson & Rodgers, 2004). Competence need satisfaction has also emerged as a partial mediator of the relationship between autonomy

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