What Motivates Highly Active Mothers? A Self-Determination Theory Perspective

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**Background**

Extensive research demonstrates the role of physical activity (PA) in enhancing overall well-being, longevity, and disease prevention. Physical inactivity is a major global health concern linked to high mortality rates. Over 40% of deaths worldwide are attributable to physical inactivity, making PA a major public health concern. In the context of highly active mothers, this research seeks to understand the motivational factors that contribute to their sustained participation in PA.

**Purpose**

This qualitative research uses Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which examines how individual motivation and satisfaction with physical activity are shaped by personal experiences and beliefs. SDT postulates that psychological need satisfaction and frustration are critical motivators for PA engagement. The aim is to explore how highly active mothers perceive their PA and if they prioritize self-care as a prerequisite for care of their children.

**Methods**

An interview protocol was developed to explore the following themes: job-related motivation, fitness, autonomy, relatedness, competence, and appearance. Each participant was screened for their physical activity levels using the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) and deemed eligible based on meeting the criteria for moderate to high activity levels. Participants (n=5) were interviewed semi-structured interviews which were subsequently coded for psychological satisfaction, psychological frustration, motivation, and ability to overcome obstacles and maintain high levels of PA.

**Results**

Findings from survey data and interviews demonstrate the importance of finding a way to prioritize yourself and the habits needed for consistent participation emerged as a key finding. Participants collectively expressed greater psychological satisfaction (32) than frustration (19). Any disparities in coding between researchers were subject to discussion and analysis, ultimately leading to a consensus on the final coding.

**Discussion**

Motivational Themes From IPAQ Survey

<table>
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<th>Job-related Motivation</th>
<th>Fitness</th>
<th>Autonomy</th>
<th>Relatedness</th>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Appearance</th>
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</thead>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

Motivating highly active mothers to remain highly active requires a focus on psychological satisfaction, motivation, and ability to overcome obstacles. Future research with larger and more diverse samples can provide opportunities for mastery of PA. Findings suggest that clinicians should promote the value of self-care and prevent engagement in PA and provide resources to overcome them. Our clinicians working with mothers should be aware of the challenges that putting myself first and prioritizing self-care may bring.

**References**