The Theory of Planned Behavior and the Transtheoretical Model in Exercise Contexts: Korean Studies

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This paper reviewed Korean studies in an attempt to verify the generalizability of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) and the transtheoretical model (TTM) in exercise settings. Overall, the studies were in general agreement with the previous findings reported by Western countries. Furthermore, this paper proposed a causal model of exercise behavior incorporating the TPB and TTM constructs, and preliminarily validated using Korean older adults. Their exercise intentions and behaviors were continuously changed under the influence of cognitive and behavioral strategies and social cognitive variables (attitude, group conformity and self-efficacy). Finally, research directions were discussed to extend the cross-cultural generalizability of the theoretical frameworks of exercise behavior.

key words: Theory of Planned Behavior, Transtheoretical Model, Exercise

Introduction

Regular exercise leads to enhanced physical health as well as a variety of social-psychological benefits for the general public. A number of studies have showed that exercise reduces risks of various diseases (e.g., osteoporosis, obesity, diabetes, and stroke), and positively relates to human mental health (Landers & Arent, 2001). However, there is evidence that a large portion of the Korean population does not participate in regular exercise: 34.3% of Korean adults never exercise, and 32.5% of them participate in exercise fewer than three times per week (Kim, Cardinal, & Lee, 2006). Furthermore, approximately 50% of people who start exercise programs relapse within six months (Dishman, 1988).

Such awareness has led to a large amount of research related to determinants of
exercise behavior and theoretical models regarding why people intend to participate in exercise and how people continue chosen exercise for a long time. Theoretical models enable us to understand complex networks of variables and possible underlying mechanism for exercise behaviors (Buckworth & Dishman, 2001). Research on exercise and behavior changes has examined a variety of models and theories to explain and predict the adoption and maintenance of exercise behaviors, such as belief attitude theories (e.g., health belief model, theories of planned behavior), the competence-based theories (e.g., self-efficacy theory), control-based theories (e.g., self-determination theory), and decision-making theories (e.g., transtheoretical model) (Biddle & Nigg, 2000). Theoretical understanding for exercise behavior changes is an important step in developing interventions to encourage people to participate in regular exercise.

Two of the most frequently studied models of exercise behavior change are the theory of planned behavior (TPB: Ajzen, 1991) and the transtheoretical model (TTM: Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983). Basically, the TPB is regarded as a continuous model that individuals are placed along a continuum that reflects the likelihood of action. This model assumes that the higher the intention, the more likely the corresponding exercise behavior. However, the TTM is regarded as a stage model that individuals move through discrete stages while preparing and realizing behavior change. This model assumes that individuals at different stages will think and behave in different ways (Lippke, Ziegelmann, & Schwarzer, 2005).

For more than a decade, a number of studies across a wide range of populations and settings provided strong support for the utility and applicability of these theoretical models for explaining exercise behavior changes (Downs & Houseenblas, 2005; Marshall & Biddle, 2001). However, most of the studies have been conducted in Western countries. Korean culture is characterized by collectivism and Confucianism among group members, whereas the Western cultures tend to place a high value on independence and horizontal relationships. Since human behaviors are subject to societal and cultural influences, it is plausible to assume that psychological constructs and processes in exercise may vary and be functional in a particular society and culture (Yoo, 2006).

A series of studies attempted to verify the generalizability of the TBP and TTM in exercise settings in Korea. Major findings from the studies independently conducted in Korea will be briefly presented in this paper. In the line of methodological strategies adopted from the studies in Western countries, the first