OPEN ACCESS
Advances in Health and Exercise

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Examination of the motivation of members of healthy lifestyle and fitness centers to sustain exercise

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Received:
November 04, 2025

Accepted:
December 29, 2025

Online Published:
December 30, 2025

Keywords:
Motivation, exercise, fitness center.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the motivation to keep exercising among members of healthy lifestyle and fitness centers. It was designed using a quantitative research method. The study participant consisted of 158 adults receiving wellness and fitness services. A personal information form and the exercise maintenance motivation scale were used as data collection tools. Descriptive statistics and comparative analyses indicated that participants' motivation to keep exercising was generally high. Significant differences were found between motivation scores based on gender and frequency of fitness center use. However, no significant difference was observed based on age and income level. The findings suggest that exercise motivation is influenced by individual and demographic characteristics, and that regular physical activity strengthens motivation. Therefore, it is recommended that motivation-supporting programs be developed at fitness centers and that specialized programs be planned for different demographic groups.

Introduction

Today, physical activity is considered a fundamental requirement for maintaining individuals' physical, psychological, and social well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) emphasizes that regular exercise protects cardiovascular health, reduces the risk of obesity and chronic diseases, and has positive effects on mental health. However, despite these positive outcomes, it is known that individuals face various challenges initiating and, more importantly, maintaining the habit of exercise. The low rates of long-term exercise adherence, particularly among members of fitness and wellness centers, make examining motivational factors in this area crucial.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) is one of the most commonly used theoretical frameworks to explain behavioral persistence. It explains individuals' exercise maintaining behavior through the levels of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and a motivation. It has been reported that when intrinsic motivation is high, individuals enjoy exercise, and factors such as personal growth, health gain, and psychological satisfaction increase the continuation of the behavior (Teixeira et al., 2012). Conversely, studies have shown that individuals who exercise solely for extrinsic motivation, such as appearance anxiety or social pressure, are less likely to continue exercising (Ingledew & Markland, 2008; Erdoğan & Şirin, 2020).

Another approach used to explain the motivational infrastructure of fitness center participation is the *Exercise Motivation Process Model*, which suggests that environmental factors, social support elements, and personal expectations shape behavior (Dishman et al., 2005). In this context, the support of the instructor, physical environment, equipment diversity, and group classes offered by fitness centers have been reported to influence motivation. For example, one important study found that positive communication between members and instructors increases workout commitment and satisfaction (Rodrigues et al., 2020). Similarly, group classes are reported to contribute to exercise continuity by increasing social connectedness and a sense of belonging (Burke et al., 2006).

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To Cite: Temur, E., Erdoğan, A., Taşgın, E., & Şirin, E., F. (2025). Examination of the motivation of members of healthy lifestyle and fitness centers to sustain exercise. *Adv Health Exerc*, 5(2), 188-193.

Factors influencing exercise motivation are not limited to environmental factors. Individuals' personal variables, such as age, gender, occupation, body image, and health status, also play a significant role in the sustainability of behavior. For example, while young adults' motivations for exercise participation are more focused on appearance and physical fitness, motivations for health gain and disease prevention become more dominant in older age groups (Allender et al., 2006). Studies on gender differences indicate that women often engage in exercise for psychological well-being, weight control, and body satisfaction, while men may be motivated by performance and muscle strength gains (Kilpatrick et al., 2005).

Despite the growth of the fitness industry in recent years and the rise in membership rates at sports centers, long-term exercise adherence remains low. Numerous studies indicate that a significant portion of members abandon regular participation within the first 3–6 months (Jakicic et al., 2019). This requires a detailed examination of the motivational factors that influence the maintenance of exercise behavior. Increasing evidence suggests that attendance at sports centers can be increased by supporting both an individual's intrinsic motivation factors and appropriately managing environmental factors (Teixeira et al., 2012).

A review of studies conducted in Türkiye reveals similar results. Studies conducted on wellness center members have reported that weight control, physical appearance, health gains, and stress management are among the primary reasons individuals begin exercising, but that continued exercise is largely dependent on intrinsic motivation and social support (Kaya, 2019; Erdoğan & Şirin, 2020; Çakmak & Alıncak, 2023). In this context, the quality of the exercise environment, the instructor's approach, and the individual's sense of self-efficacy appear to be determining factors in continuation behavior.

All these findings demonstrate that motivation to continue exercising in wellness and fitness centers is a multidimensional phenomenon. Maintaining the behavior is simultaneously shaped by individual characteristics, psychological needs, the social environment, and the physical conditions offered by sports centers. Therefore, a detailed examination of exercise motivation is critical for sports centers to increase member loyalty, develop more effective programs, and increase community participation in physical activity.

This study aims to examine the motivation of individuals who are members of wellness and fitness centers to continue exercising and to determine the factors that influence motivation. The findings are expected to make significant contributions to improving service quality in the fitness industry, strengthening individuals' exercise commitment, and ensuring the sustainability of exercise behavior.

Methods

The data obtained in this study were evaluated within the scope of a quantitative research approach and analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Descriptive analysis is a statistical method used to organize, summarize, and reveal basic characteristics of data, providing an understanding of the general structure of the sample (Büyüköztürk, 2020).

Participants

The population of this study consists of individuals receiving wellness and fitness services in Karaman province. The study sample consists of 158 wellness and fitness center members who were selected from this population using simple random sampling and volunteered to participate in the study. Participants were selected from among members of the Uni Athletic Sports Complex operating in Karaman province.

Considering the number of items in the scale used in the study, the rule of "sample size at least 5 times the number of items" was used as a basis. In quantitative research, and particularly in studies based on the use of scales, it is recommended to reach at least 5–10 times the number of items to ensure a sufficient sample size for the reliability of statistical analyses (Büyüköztürk, 2020). Therefore, considering the total number of items in the scale included in the study, it appears that the required minimum sample size was met. Reaching 158 participants in the study both meets this rule and supports the validity of the descriptive statistics.

Measurement Tools Used in the Research

The measurement tools used for the study consisted of two parts. The first part used a personal information form developed by the researchers, and the second part used a motivation to continue exercise scale.

Personal Information Form

The form created to obtain the personal information of participants consists of questions such as age, gender, income status, and frequency of using the sports center.

The Exercise Maintenance Motivation Scale

The Exercise Maintenance Motivation Scale was used in the study to determine participants' motivation levels to continue exercising. The original form of the scale was developed by Nam et al. (2023), and its adaptation to Turkish culture was carried out by Öztaş et al. (2024). The scale consists of 30 items and 5 subdimensions arranged on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree - 5 = Strongly Agree). In the Turkish adaptation study, the structural validity of the scale was tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and the 30-item, five-factor structure was confirmed. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be Cronbach's Alpha = 0.95, and the test-retest reliability coefficient was reported to be high. These results indicate that the scale is a valid and reliable measurement tool in Turkish samples.

Data Collection Process

Data were collected via an online survey from participants who volunteered to participate. During the data collection process, the purpose and scope of the study were explained to the participants, followed by a personal information form and the exercise maintenance motivation scale. Completing the surveys took an average of 10–15 minutes. Data were collected from members of the Uni Athletic Sports Complex in Karaman province, and the process was conducted in accordance with ethical principles.

Data Analysis

The data obtained in the study were analyzed using quantitative data analysis techniques. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation) were used to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and their responses to the scale items. Skewness–kurtosis values were examined to verify the data's conformity to a normal distribution. Scale scores were evaluated and interpreted using the SPSS software package, and the analysis results are presented in tables.

Results

An examination of Table 1 reveals that the participating members of healthy lifestyle and fitness center were male (58.9%) and female (41.1%). Age distribution reveals that the highest number of participants (34.2%) was aged 18-25, while the lowest number (20.3%) was aged 41 and over. When examining the frequency of use of the fitness center, the highest rate was 3-5 days per week (43.7%), and the lowest rate was 6 or more days per week (20.3%).

Table 1

Personal information of participants.

Variables		n	%
Gender	Male	93	58.9
	Female	65	41.1
	Total	158	100,0
Age	18-25	54	34.2
	26-33	39	24.7
	34-40	33	20.9
	41 and above	32	20.3
	Total	158	100.0
Duration of Use of the Sports Center	0-2 Days	57	36.1
	3-5 Days	69	43.7
	6 and above	32	20.3
	Total	158	100.0

When the distortion and kurtosis values of the data obtained regarding motivation to continue exercise were examined within the scope of the study, it can be stated that the distribution ranged between +1.5 and -1.5. Based on the findings, it can be stated that the data showed a normal distribution.

Table 2

Table of Skewness-Kurtosis Values of Participants' Scale

Scale	n	Distortion	Kurtosis
The Exercise Maintenance Motivation Scale	158	1.175	1.853

An examination of participants' scores on the Exercise Maintenance Motivation Scale reveals that the mean was 3.88±0.69. This finding indicates that participants' motivation to continue exercise was generally high (Table 3).

In the comparison made according to the gender variable, it was observed that the average score for motivation to continue exercise (Mean=4.04) was higher in male participants than in female participants. The statistical analysis revealed that the difference between the groups was significant ($p<0.05$; Table 4).

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of participants' scores on the Exercise Maintenance Motivation Scale.

Scale	n	Min.	Max.	Mean ± SD
The Exercise Maintenance Motivation Scale	158	1.00	5.00	3.88 ± 0.69

Table 4
Comparison of participants' scores on the Exercise Maintenance Motivation Scale by gender.

Scale and Sub-Dimensions	Type	n	Mean	SD	t	*p*
The Exercise Maintenance Motivation Scale	Female	158	4.04	0.88	0.861	0.03*
	Male		4.15	0.71		

Table 5
Comparison of participants' scores the Exercise Maintenance Motivation Scale according to income status.

Scale	Income Level	n	F	*p*
The Exercise Maintenance Motivation Scale	1.000-20.000	59	0.011	0.90
	21.000-49.000	49		
	50.000 and above	50		

Table 6
Comparison of participants' scores the Exercise Maintenance Motivation Scale according to age variable.

Scale	Ages	n	F	p
The Exercise Maintenance Motivation Scale	18-25 years	54	0.315	0.81
	26-33 years	39		
	34-40 years	33		
	41 and above	32		

Table 7
Comparison of participants' scores the Exercise Maintenance Motivation Scale based on usage status.

Scale	Usage Status	n	F	p	Difference (LSD)
The Exercise Maintenance Motivation Scale	1-2 days (1)	73	3.037	0.05	2*1
	3-4 days (2)	83			
	5 and above (3)	48			

As a result of the analysis conducted according to the income level variable, it was determined that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of motivation to continue exercise ($p<.05$; Table 5).

As a result of the analysis performed according to the age variable, it was determined that there was no significant difference between the groups in terms of motivation to continue exercising scores ($p>.05$; Table 6).

A comparison based on frequency of use of the sports center revealed a significant difference in motivation to continue exercising between the groups ($p<0.05$). The LSD test revealed that this difference was between participants who exercised 3-4 days a week and those who exercised 1-2 days a week (Table 7).

Discussion

This study examined exercise maintenance motivation scale among individuals actively participating in wellness and fitness centers. Based on the findings, it can be stated that the participants' motivation levels were generally high. This finding suggests that individuals participating in regular physical activity consider the habit of exercise not only for physical development but also as part of a healthy lifestyle. A review of the literature reveals studies supporting these findings. Numerous studies have reported that individuals who exercise regularly have high motivation levels, and that this plays a decisive role in the maintenance of the habit of exercise (Morris &

Roychowdhury, 2020; Navarro et al., 2020; Ivanović & Ivanović, 201).

The study found that male participants had a higher motivation to continue exercising than female participants. This finding is consistent with some research findings that males have a higher motivation to participate in physical activity (Kilpatrick et al., 2005). This may be due to men's perception of physical activity as more performance-, strength-, and competitive, while women's focus on appearance, aesthetics, and health is key. However, some studies have also highlighted that women are more committed to exercise due to concerns about body image and psychological well-being. Therefore, it is anticipated that gender-related findings may differ across different research samples and contexts.

The significant difference observed based on exercise frequency is consistent with the concepts of habit and continuity, frequently emphasized in the literature. Various studies have demonstrated that regular exercise increases both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, fosters awareness of personal progress, fosters social connectedness, and enhances psychological satisfaction (Wilson et al., 2008). Therefore, increasing weekly exercise frequency can be considered an important experiential factor that strengthens motivation.

This study found no statistically significant difference in income levels among individuals attending health and fitness centers compared to the variables examined. This finding indicates that participation in fitness and health centers is no longer a behavior exclusive to high-income groups, but has become an accessible lifestyle for individuals of different income levels.

The lack of a significant difference in age suggests that motivation is not unidirectional with age. Some studies in the literature have suggested that younger individuals are motivated by competition and appearance, while adults are motivated by health and quality of life (Ingledew & Sullivan, 2002). Therefore, it can be argued that age may influence the type of motivation rather than the level of motivation.

The results suggest that fitness center members are highly motivated to continue exercising, and that various individual and demographic factors influence motivation. Future studies could explore the relationship between exercise motivation and variables such as self-efficacy, body image, life satisfaction, and social support using a scale of exercise motivation.

Authors' Contribution

Study Design: ET, AE; Data Collection: ET, EFS; Statistical Analysis: ET, AE, ET; Manuscript Preparation: EFS, AE; Funds Collection: ET, ET, AE, EFS.

Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the Selcuk University of Faculty of Sports Sciences Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee Decision (2025/254) and it was carried out in accordance with the Code of Ethics of the World Medical Association also known as a declaration of Helsinki.

Funding

The authors declare that the study received no funding.

Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that there was no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

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