

Investigating the mediating role of self-determination in the relationship between parental perceptions and adolescent lifestyle change motivation

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ABSTRACT

Motivation to change lifestyle during adolescence plays an important role in promoting physical and mental health. The aim of the present study was to investigate the mediating role of self-determination in the relationship between parental perceptions and adolescents' motivation to change their lifestyle. This study is descriptive-correlational and is an applied research type. The statistical population included all students aged 12 to 18 in Ardakan city in the academic year 2022-23, from which 301 were selected using convenience sampling. Data collection tools included questionnaires on demographic information, parental perceptions (Robbins et al., 1994), self-determination (Dessey & Ryan, 1985), and adolescent lifestyle change motivation (Gard, Rivano, & Grahn, 2005). Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The results showed that the research conceptual model has a good fit. Mother and father perceptions had a significant effect on self-determination, and self-determination mediated the relationship between parental perceptions and motivation to change lifestyle. However, the direct relationship between father perception and motivation for lifestyle change was not significant. These findings emphasize the decisive role of self-determination as a psychological mechanism in the process of influencing parenting styles on adolescents' intrinsic motivation and indicate the importance of paying attention to the way parents interact in psychoeducational interventions. Conclusion: The findings of this study emphasize the importance of the role of self-determination as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between parental perceptions and the motivation to change lifestyle in adolescents.

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Introduction

Adolescence is a gradual transition from childhood to adulthood, during which cognitive, emotional, and social skills undergo transformation and development. Simultaneously, the adolescent begins to seek autonomy from the family, engage more actively with peers, and explore novel environments, sometimes accompanied by increased emotional instability and risk-taking ([Lekamge et al., 2025](#)). At this stage, adolescents confront multiple challenges, including identity formation, the acceptance of new roles, and the setting of personal goals. Successful navigation of these developmental tasks necessitates the acquisition of skills such as autonomy, creativity, and adaptation to the social environment ([Ruiz & Yabut, 2024](#)). Therefore, adolescence is a unique period of transition that is accompanied by physical, psychological, and social changes. In addition to these changes, the discovery of identity is also considered one of the most important features of this period ([Shek & Dou, 2020](#)). Motivation, as the driving force behind human behavior, plays a fundamental role in this process. This psychological construct, which can be intrinsic (arising from inherent needs) or extrinsic (based on rewards and social pressures), determines the orientation and persistence of behaviors. Studies have shown that the motivation for change, particularly toward modifying lifestyle, is a vital component for the mental and physical health of adolescents ([Dorn et al., 2023](#)). Lifestyle refers to a set of relatively stable behavioral patterns in domains such as nutrition, sleep, physical activity, substance use, and social relationships, which influence an individual's quality of life and health ([World Health Organization, 2023](#)). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a healthy lifestyle is not only influenced by environmental and social factors but is also closely linked to psychological factors such as motivation and self-efficacy. Among these factors, intrinsic motivation for lifestyle change is considered a key determinant in the selection and persistence of health-oriented behaviors ([de Oliveira Barbosa, 2024](#)).

A crucial factor in the shaping of adolescent motivation is parental behavior and the manner in which adolescents perceive these behaviors. Parental perceptions refer to adolescents' subjective interpretations of parental attitudes, parenting styles, and their interaction patterns with them. Studies indicate that parenting practices play a significant role in fostering intrinsic motivation and the socialization process of adolescents by fulfilling their basic psychological needs, including autonomy, competence, and relatedness ([niaki & Asadi, 2025](#)). Conversely, controlling or inconsistent parenting styles can lead to resistance to change, reduced intrinsic motivation, and an increased likelihood of high-risk behaviors in adolescents. Some parents adopt a permissive parenting style, showing little or no attention to their children and their needs. For such parents, their children's activities and academic life are not significant, and they show negligence (or deficiency) in teaching social behaviors, which results in academic decline in the children ([Brummer et al., 2021](#)). The findings of [Zhang et al. \(2020\)](#) also emphasize that supportive and encouraging parental behaviors practices that back adolescents' psychological needs are positively associated with their intrinsic motivation for adopting a healthy lifestyle. Conversely, controlling parenting styles are linked to low or unhealthy motivation. In other words, the adolescent's perception of parental behavior directly influences their motivation, and this motivation, in turn, strengthens behaviors related to a healthy lifestyle.

[Deci and Ryan \(2017\)](#), within the framework of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), regard the parental role in their children's motivation as comprising three components: 1) Parental involvement, meaning knowing the teenager's favorite activities and actively participating in them; 2) Supporting autonomy, meaning encouraging adolescents to solve problems and providing them with the right to choose; 3) Warmth and affection, meaning expressing love, interest, and acceptance towards the child ([Nademi & Saeidi Rezvani, 2024](#)). From the perspective of this theory, Self-Determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enables an individual to engage in goal-setting, self-regulation, and autonomous behaviors, leading to greater control over one's life and effective role functioning in adulthood ([Grenier et al., 2024](#)). Accordingly, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a conceptual framework for understanding intrinsic motivation and psychological-social interactions, emphasizing that the feeling of control and choice in behavior is a key predictor of health-oriented behaviors, including lifestyle change. Parents who support their children's autonomy not only enhance the adolescent's psychological well-being but also strengthen

their intrinsic motivation to engage in desirable behaviors, such as healthy nutrition, or to reduce high-risk behaviors (Yap & Baharudin, 2016). Research by Click (2024) confirms that parental support for autonomy directly leads to the satisfaction of psychological needs, including autonomy, competence, and belonging, and the satisfaction of these needs increases adolescents' self-control and intrinsic motivation, which are vital for any type of healthy behavior. Abedin et al. (2022) also demonstrated in their research that a supportive parenting style is associated with increased satisfaction of adolescents' basic psychological needs. This need satisfaction, in turn, contributes to the formation of positive motivation and greater well-being in them. In effect, parental autonomy support and emotional warmth play a significant role in the adolescent's motivation and mental health.

Consequently, based on the literature reviewed and considering the critical importance of adolescence as the key stage for identity and intrinsic motivation formation, alongside the crucial role of the family environment, specifically through parental perceptions (such as autonomy support and emotional warmth), the present study seeks to answer the following fundamental question: Does Self-Determination play a mediating role in elucidating the relationship between adolescents' perceptions of parental parenting styles and their motivation for lifestyle change?

Method

Sample and Sampling Method

The present study is descriptive and correlational in nature and is classified as applied research in terms of purpose. The statistical population of this study included all students aged 15 to 18 in Ardakan city in 2023. Sampling was done using convenience sampling, and ultimately, 301 students participated in this study. Data collection was conducted electronically between July 2 and September 17, 2023. To facilitate data collection, a questionnaire was designed and uploaded to the Porseline website, and its link was provided to the students. The obtained data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 statistical software.

Tools Used

Demographic questionnaire

This questionnaire includes several introductory questions to collect demographic information about participating adolescents, including: age, gender, marital status, level of education, parents' education, number of siblings, and parents' occupation.

Parental Perceptions Questionnaire

This questionnaire was developed in 1994 by R.J. Robbins et al. and has two versions for children and college students. In this study, the second version, which was designed to suit adolescent ages, was used. This 42-item scale has two parent and parent sections (21 items each) that are completely similar. This questionnaire has components of engagement, autonomy support, and acceptance or warmth, which are based on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all true of me) to 7 (completely true of me). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this questionnaire in the research of Chirka and Ryan and Ryan et al. has been mentioned as 0.85 to 0.93. The validity of the maternal and paternal autonomy support subscales was 0.80 and 0.83, respectively, in the original study (Robbins, 1994). The construct validity of this scale was examined in a sample of high school students using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, and it yielded a 40-item structure with six subscales and Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.82 to 0.93 for the subscales and 0.83 for the entire scale (Tanhaye Rashvanloo and Hejazi, 2018).

Self-determination questionnaire

[LaGuardia, Deci, and Ryan \(2000\)](#) developed this scale that measures the level of self-determination motivation of individuals. The scale includes 21 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, and three subscales measure feelings of support for the needs of autonomy, competence, and connection with others. Desi and Ryan reported a reliability coefficient of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha for the entire test of 89%. In [Hedeem \(2005\)](#) study, in addition to the high validity and reliability reported for this questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was reported as 0.90 for the entire scale and 0.85, 0.76, and 0.86 for the subscales. [Besharat and Ranjbar \(2013\)](#) validated this scale on a sample of Iranian students, and the results showed sufficient validity and reliability, and they reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the communication, autonomy, and competence subscales as 0.89, 0.91, and 0.87, respectively.

Adolescent Lifestyle Change Motivation Questionnaire

This questionnaire was developed by [Gard et al. \(2005\)](#) with the aim of describing the development of motivation for change and measuring the strength of motivating factors for changing an individual's life. This questionnaire has 28 questions and 7 components. Seven scales related to motivation to change life situation (28 items): assess social support, mastery of life, challenges in life, control in life, values, self-efficacy, and self-confidence. The reliability and concurrent validity of this test were calculated using the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC), respectively, and the 95% confidence interval was significant by Krahn and Gard (2008) with the Nordic General Questionnaire, the Situation Sense Questionnaire, and the Theory of Action Questionnaire using the Spearman rank correlation coefficient method ([Gard et al., 2005](#)).

Research findings

In this study, 301 students from Ardakan city participated, of which 225 were girls and 76 were boys. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the research subjects.

Table 1. Treatment protocol

Meeting number	Meeting title	Meeting content
First session	Completing the demographic questionnaire and explaining the clients	Explaining problem-solving skills and measuring them in the experimental group.
Second session	Orientation (first step in problem solving)	Discuss problem-solving skills, encourage people to express themselves through story reading, and determine people's orientation towards problem-solving.
Third session	Strengthening the orientation step	Practice identifying ways to cope with problems, explaining negative automatic thoughts, explaining the principle of stopping thoughts, and identifying the negative and positive thoughts associated with the problem.
Fourth session	Problem definition	Given the direction set in previous meetings, efforts are made to focus the discussion on the issues, discuss them in more detail if necessary, break down the issues (if complex) into their components, set short-term goals, and avoid long-term and unattainable goals.
Fifth session	Strengthening the problem definition	Generating solutions to problems without judging whether they are right or wrong, explaining the brainstorming technique, fluidizing the mind, and writing down all possible solutions.
Sixth session	Generating alternative solutions	Teaching how to select appropriate solutions and compare them with other selection methods, the if...then..., overall screening, and discarding weak solutions.
Seventh session	Continue to produce alternative solutions	After reviewing the rules and principles, the subjects' problems are examined and solved. This session presents an incomplete story so that individuals can practice presenting different solutions.
Eighth session	Decision-making	Anticipating the possible consequences of each action and paying attention to the usefulness of its consequences.

Ninth session	Implement the selected solution	Implementing the chosen solution along with reinforcement and exercises in interpersonal relationships.
Tenth session	Emphasis on means-end thinking and review	Organizing and reviewing the steps, explaining the means-ends thinking method.
Eleventh session	Review	Review all stages of problem-solving and conduct a problem-solving skills assessment.

Procedure

This study was conducted using a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test. First, inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. The inclusion criteria for the study were: obtaining written consent from parents and students, and achieving satisfactory scores on intelligence tests and differential tasks. The exclusion criteria included absence from more than two training sessions and expressing unwillingness to continue participation in the training program.

After selecting the sample based on the aforementioned criteria and randomly dividing participants into experimental and control groups, the pre-test phase was administered to both groups to measure their levels of cognitive fatigue and executive functions before the intervention.

The educational intervention consisted of a problem-solving training program that was implemented for 11 one-hour sessions with a frequency of three sessions per week for the experimental group. This training program was completed over approximately 4 weeks. The control group received no specific intervention during this period and continued their regular activities.

After completion of the training period, the post-test phase was conducted for both groups to evaluate possible changes in the dependent variables (cognitive fatigue and executive functions). The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software version 25 and employing Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) method to examine the effectiveness of the educational intervention.

Results

In this study, 40 students (20 experimental group and 20 control group) were studied, and the effect of problem-solving training on cognitive fatigue and executive functions was examined. The table below presents the descriptive statistics for the research variables (Table 2).

Table (1) Demographic characteristics

Variable	value	frequency	percentage
Gender	girl/boy	76/225	0.25-0.75
Age	10-12	7	0.2
	13-15	59	0.2
	16-18	235	0.88
Father's education	Below high school level	77	0.26
	Diploma		0.32
	post graduate	95	0.12
	Bachelor's degree	36	0.22
	Master's degree	65	0.9
		28	
Mother's education	Below high school level	84	0.28
	Diploma	99	0.33
	post graduate	36	0.12
	Bachelor's degree	62	0.21
	Master's degree	20	0.7

In Table 1, As can be seen, 25% (76) of the respondents were boys and 75% (225) of the respondents were girls.

Table (2) Investigation of the Correlation Coefficient between Variables

Variables	1	2	3
1 Mother Perception	1		
2 Father Perception	0.569**	1	
3 Self-Determination	0.616**	0.429**	1
4 Motivationfor Lifestyle Change	-0.610**	-0.407**	-0.650**

As can be seen in the table (2), all variables have a significant relationship with each other at a 95% confidence level.

Table (3) Significance level of variables, significance of coefficients of direct paths of the structural model

Independent Variable	->	Dependent Variable	t-value	P-value
Mother Perception	->	Self-Determination	10.013	0.000
Father Perception	->	Self-Determination	2.121	0.034
Mother Perception	->	Motivation for Lifestyle Change	-5.548	0.000
Father Perception	->	Motivation for Lifestyle Change	-0.751	0.453
Self-Determination	->	Motivation for Lifestyle Change	-8.317	0.000

The results of Table (3) indicate that all the estimated direct path coefficients, except for the path of father's perception on the motivation to change lifestyle ($P=0.435>0.05$), are significant at the 95% level.

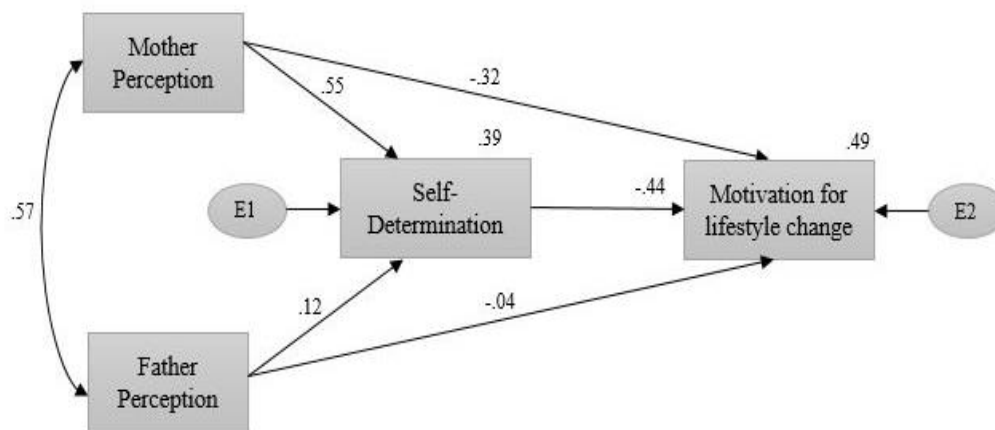


Figure 1. Structural model of the research in the standard coefficients mode

Discussion & conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the mediating role of self-determination in the relationship between parental perceptions and motivation for lifestyle change in adolescents. The results of the first hypothesis indicate that maternal perception exerts a significant and positive effect on adolescents' motivation for lifestyle change. These findings are consistent with the studies conducted by Seyed ([seyedkhorasani et al., 2023](#); [Vegadiaz et al., 2023](#); [Geravand 2022](#) ; [Janssen et al. 2021](#) ; & [Shallwick et al. 2015](#)). [Vigadiaz et al. \(2023\)](#) conducted a study investigating how perceived parenting styles affect individuals' motivation for health-oriented physical activity and their intention to be physically active. The results indicate that perceived parenting styles affect the quality of intrinsic motivation (Integrated Regulation) and the lack of motivation (Amotivation) in individuals. In fact, these results were complex; adolescents who had received both high affection and simultaneously experienced high hostility and neglect scored higher on the Integrated Regulation variable, which is a strong form of intrinsic motivation. To explain the obtained finding, it should be stated that, consistent with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), parenting patterns can facilitate development, intrinsic motivation, and self-regulation when they satisfy adolescents' basic psychological needs, including autonomy, competence, and the adolescent's positive perception of the caregiver's behavior, such as emotional support, effective communication, and providing opportunities for decision-making, which directly leads to the strengthening of autonomy and a sense of ownership over their behavior ([Ryan & Deci, 2020](#)). This factor increases the likelihood of adolescents engaging in healthy behaviors and adopting a desirable lifestyle. In other words, considering the mother's role in the Iranian cultural context, the closer emotional relationship and greater daily interactions between the mother and the adolescent can strengthen this influence. Supportive parenting behaviors, particularly from the mother, are associated with increased intrinsic motivation, resilience, and independent decision-making in adolescents. Therefore, when adolescents perceive their mother as supportive, accepting, and accompanying, there is a higher probability that their need for autonomy and sense of competence will be met, consequently promoting their self-determination. Based on the research data, the significant positive effect of perceived father involvement on self-determination was confirmed with a confidence level of 95%, and the standardized path coefficient indicates that approximately 11% of the variance in adolescents' self-determination is explained by their perception of the father's behavior. Although this amount is less than the mother's contribution, it still indicates the father's influential role in the adolescent's motivational structure. Previous research also suggests that the father's active involvement in upbringing activities, emotional and behavioral responsiveness, and effective presence in the child's daily life satisfy adolescents' need for relatedness and belonging ([Reeve, 2016](#)). When the adolescent feels that the father genuinely cares about their well-being, success, and mental health, the father-child relationship transforms into a source of psychological security; consequently, the process of internalizing values and motivations occurs with greater depth. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that the adolescent's perception of the father's parenting behaviors is influential not only on overt behaviors but also on deeper psychological processes such as the formation of intrinsic motivation and autonomy. In other words, the more accepting, supportive, and responsive the father is, and the more he provides the adolescent with opportunities for experience and choice, the higher the probability that the child can satisfy the need for autonomy and pursue a path of healthy motivational development. Hence, the results of this study, in support of the second hypothesis, align with extensive national and international literature.

The second research finding indicated a significant and positive relationship between self-determination and adolescents' motivation for lifestyle change. This explanation is essentially centered on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and states that the quality of motivation (and not merely its quantity) is what ensures behavioral persistence. The more self-determined adolescents are on this continuum (meaning their motivation shifts from external control toward Integrated Regulation and Intrinsic Motivation), the more they internalize lifestyle changes (such as physical activity or healthy eating habits) as a free and valuable choice for themselves. This autonomous motivation necessitates the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, including Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness ([Ryan & Deci, 2020](#)). The review study by

[Ntoumanis et al. \(2021\)](#) also confirms that when basic needs are satisfied, adolescents develop a sense of ownership over the change process and maintain the necessary effort and commitment to sustain challenging health behaviors over time. Therefore, self-determined motivation, due to its intrinsic roots and association with personal values, increases resistance to lapses and is a key factor in explaining the successful realization of long-term lifestyle changes.

Another research finding indicates that parental perceptions influence adolescents' motivation for lifestyle change through the mediation of self-determination. This finding is aligned with the results of the study by [\(SeyedKhorasani et al.,2023; Vigadiaz et al., 2023 & Zhang et al.,2020\)](#). In fact, the finding that parental perceptions influence adolescents' motivation for lifestyle change through the mediation of self-determination has a logical and cohesive explanation within the framework of SDT. In this mediation model, the adolescent's perception of parenting style (especially support for or lack of support for autonomy) acts as a sociopsychological environment that directly affects the satisfaction of the adolescent's basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). In other words, parents who provide a highly autonomy-supportive environment reinforce the adolescent's sense of ownership and internal control over their actions, thereby satisfying their psychological needs. This satisfaction of needs, subsequently, leads to the adolescent's motivation shifting from external and controlled levels toward autonomous (self-determined) motivation. These findings strongly affirm this mediating mechanism that self-determined motivation, due to its intrinsic roots and association with personal values, guarantees long-term commitment and persistence in lifestyle changes (such as physical activity or eating habits). Therefore, self-determination plays the role of the transmission channel for the effect, transforming the positive influence of parental perceptions on motivation for behavioral change into a sustainable process resistant to lapses.

Since the sampling was conducted online, there is a possibility of selection bias. This sampling method may have resulted in the recruitment of adolescents who are above the average in terms of digital literacy or socioeconomic status, which limits the generalizability of the results to the entire adolescent population. According to the research results, it is necessary to determine the causal patterns and long-term effects of parental autonomy support on self-determination and sustainability of adolescent health-related behaviors, especially by considering moderating factors such as gender and socioeconomic context.

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