

**Two worlds colliding: A motivational and motor development perspective on youngsters' engagement in physical activity and sports**

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## Abstract

*Objectives:* Physical activity (PA) is associated with many health benefits but low PA levels have been reported across the globe, even among young children. Despite evidence in support of the Self-Determination Theory (SDT, Deci & Ryan, 2000)–proposed relationships between competence satisfaction, autonomous motivation, and PA in adults and adolescents, there is only limited proof that these relationships also apply to children. Likewise, there is no conclusive evidence for the mediating effect of perceived motor competence (PMC) in the relationship between actual motor competence (AMC) and PA in children, as suggested by the conceptual model (Stodden et al., 2008). Therefore, the aim of the current study was to examine whether the PA-pathways as suggested by the conceptual model and SDT apply to children.

*Methods:* 627 children (51.67% boys, 8-13 yrs) completed validated questionnaires to assess weekly sports participation (FPAQ), PMC (SPPC), competence satisfaction (PNSE), and motivation for sports (BREQ). Children's AMC was assessed with the KTK. Structural Equation Modeling was conducted to examine the theory-based pathways from AMC via PMC, competence satisfaction, and autonomous motivation to organized sports participation.

*Results:* We found a significant, direct effect from AMC to sports participation ( $\beta=.142, p=.001$ ) with PMC, but not competence satisfaction or autonomous motivation, partially mediating this relationship ( $\beta =.119, p<.001$ ).

*Conclusion:* The results suggest that, among children in middle and late childhood, AMC relates to sports participation and this relationship is, as proposed in the conceptual model, mediated by PMC. PMC also significantly relates to competence satisfaction and autonomous sports-motivation but the last two SDT-related constructs do not add to the prediction of organized sports

participation when being integrated in the conceptual model. Based on the evidence that both AMC and PMC are crucial with respect to children's sports participation, it is recommended that physical education teachers and coaches foster both.

## **References**

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78