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Exploring the Reasons for Not Prolonging Gym Participation

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the factors that contribute to the discontinuation or lack of prolonged participation in gym activities in Pakistan, emphasizing how these barriers affect individuals' ability to maintain regular physical activity. The aim is to identify and understand the barriers faced by gym-goers by applying Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in sustaining motivation. Employing a qualitative research design, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with 21 participants who had engaged in gym activities for a period ranging from one to six months. Data was analyzed using a two-level coding method, including open and axial coding, to identify key themes. The findings revealed six primary barriers: economic constraints, cultural and social norms, lack of facilities, time limitations, temporary commitments, and lack of motivation or visible results. These barriers undermine participants' intrinsic motivation by limiting their autonomy, competence, and sense of relatedness. The findings highlight significant implications for society and gym management, emphasizing the need to address these barriers through inclusive, affordable, and culturally sensitive gym environments. By fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness, gyms can play a pivotal role in promoting long-term engagement in fitness activities, contributing to improved public health and well-being.

Keywords: Gym Participation; Self-Determination Theory (SDT); Gym Constraints, Physical Activity Motivation, Physical activity Commitment

Spor Salonuna Devam Etmeme Nedenlerinin Keşfi

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ÖZ

Bu çalışma, Pakistan'da spor salonu faaliyetlerine katılımın kesilmesine veya uzun süreli olmamasına katkıda bulunan faktörleri araştırmakta ve bu engellerin bireylerin düzenli fiziksel aktiviteyi sürdürme becerilerini nasıl etkilediğini vurgulamaktadır. Amaç, motivasyonun sürdürülmesinde özerklik, yeterlilik ve ilişkiselliğin rolünü vurgulayan Öz Belirleme Teorisi'ni (SDT) uygulayarak spor salonu müdavimlerinin karşılaştığı engelleri tespit etmek ve anlamaktır. Nitel bir araştırma tasarımının kullanıldığı çalışmada, bir ila altı ay arasında değişen bir süre boyunca spor salonu faaliyetlerine katılan 21 katılımcı ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Veriler, ana temaları belirlemek için açık ve eksenel kodlamayı içeren iki seviyeli bir kodlama yöntemi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Bulgular altı temel engeli ortaya çıkarmıştır: ekonomik kısıtlamalar, kültürel ve sosyal normlar, tesis eksikliği, zaman sınırlamaları, geçici taahhütler ve motivasyon veya görünür sonuç eksikliği. Bu engeller, katılımcıların özerkliklerini, yetkinliklerini ve bağımlık duygularını sınırlandırarak içsel motivasyonlarını zayıflatmaktadır. Bulgular, toplum ve spor salonu yönetimi için önemli çıkarımların altını çizmekte ve bu engellerin kapsayıcı, uygun fiyatlı ve kültürel açıdan hassas spor salonu ortamları aracılığıyla ele alınması gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Spor salonları özerkliği, yetkinliği ve ilişkiselliği teşvik ederek, fitness faaliyetlerine uzun vadeli katılımı teşvik etmede önemli bir rol oynayabilir ve halk sağlığı ve refahının iyileştirilmesine katkıda bulunabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Spor Salonu Katılımı; Öz Belirleme Teorisi (SDT); Spor Salonu Kısıtlamaları, Fiziksel Aktivite Motivasyonu, Fiziksel aktivite Bağıllığı

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Giriş

Gyms have become increasingly pivotal in promoting physical health and well-being, offering structured environments that facilitate regular exercise and fitness development. They provide individuals with access to specialized equipment, fitness classes, and professional guidance, all of which are integral to achieving and maintaining physical health (Narula et al., 2023). Regular gym attendance is linked to numerous benefits, including improved cardiovascular health, enhanced mental well-being, and greater overall physical fitness. Physical activity plays a critical role in combating non-communicable diseases, reducing stress, and enhancing overall quality of life, making it an essential component of a healthy lifestyle (Khosravi et al., 2024).

Despite its benefits, challenges to physical activity and gym participation vary across contexts, particularly in developing countries. In Pakistan, 64% of the population is under 30 and urbanization is on the rise (Kundi, 2018), gyms represent an important avenue for young people to engage in healthy lifestyles amidst rapidly changing societal norms and economic pressures. However, the country faces significant barriers to promoting physical activity, stemming from its socio-economic and cultural dynamics. Pakistan, as a developing country with high inflation rates and deeply rooted conservative cultural values, presents several challenges for individuals seeking to maintain long-term gym memberships. Despite a strong cultural interest in cricket, other sports struggle to gain popularity and maintain their presence in the country (Hasaan, 2021; Hasaan et al., 2018). Additionally, the overall physical activity level remains low, even with the increasing trend toward urbanization (Jabeen et al., 2018).

Economic constraints often make gym memberships a considerable financial burden, especially for young adults who may have limited financial means. Moreover, gym participation in Pakistan is influenced by a complex interplay of socio-cultural and economic factors, including traditional gender roles and religious norms, which can significantly restrict access, particularly for women (Manzoor et al., 2019). These barriers not only reduce motivation but also increase the likelihood of discontinuing gym attendance, highlighting the broader difficulties in fostering a culture of regular physical activity in everyday life.

The aim of this study is to investigate the reasons for leaving or not prolonging gym participation within the Pakistani context. Pakistan faces a critical public health challenge, with low levels of physical activity contributing to the rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular illnesses (Khalid & Hasaan, 2024). According to recent reports, very low numbers of adults in Pakistan meet the recommended levels of physical activity (Bukhsh et al., 2020), making interventions to promote sustained exercise participation increasingly urgent. This research will explore how economic pressures, cultural values, and social factors contribute to the challenges individuals face in maintaining long-term gym engagement.

By identifying and analyzing these barriers, the study seeks to provide insights into how gym facilities and programs can be adapted to better meet the needs of their members and enhance retention. Understanding these factors will contribute to more effective strategies for promoting sustained gym participation in a socio-economically and culturally complex environment. The findings of this study are particularly important in addressing Pakistan's growing burden of lifestyle-related diseases and declining physical activity levels. By exploring these dynamics, the study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to physical activity participation more generally, which can inform policies and initiatives aimed at increasing overall activity levels. Furthermore, the insights gained from this research providing a framework for understanding how similar socio-economic and cultural factors impact physical activity and gym participation in other developing countries.

Literature review

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that human motivation is driven by the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to SDT, individuals are most motivated when they feel that their actions are self-directed, they have a sense of mastery and effectiveness in their tasks, and they experience meaningful connections with others (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In the context of gym participation, these three basic psychological needs are crucial for sustaining long-term engagement. When gym-goers perceive that their fitness routines align with their personal values and goals, they are more likely to feel a sense of autonomy (Hall & Noonan, 2023). Similarly, feeling competent through noticeable progress and achievement in their fitness journey enhances their intrinsic motivation (White et al., 2021). Furthermore, social support from trainers and fellow gym members can foster a sense of relatedness, making the gym environment more engaging and supportive (Beddoe et al., 2024).

SDT often used for sports and physical activity. For instance, Within schools, intrinsic motivation is positively associated with academic achievement, school engagement, self-esteem, confidence, subjective wellbeing, and increased satisfaction with school (White et al., 2021). While, extrinsic motivation is positively associated with maladaptive outcomes, including boredom and negative affect (Vasconcellos et al., 2020), as it is a behavior performed for a separable consequence and, therefore, varies in terms of how controlled (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Many studies examining the relationships within SDT have utilized self-reported measures to assess PA levels (Hagger et al., 2009; Mieziene et al., 2021). Cheung (2020) indicates that students' perceptions of autonomy support from physical education (PE) teachers are positively associated with their self-reported PA. Not only teachers but parents (Petersen et al., 2020), peers

(Healy et al., 2023), siblings (Ragelienė & Grønhoj, 2020), favorite athletes (Hasaan et al., 2024), role models (Hasaan & Fişne, 2021), and sport events (Khosravi et al., 2024) also considered motivator factors for PA participation. Furthermore, past studies have identified several other factors that influence PA engagement, particularly when comparing different methods of PA measurement. For example, Morales-Sánchez et al. (2021) observed that psychosocial factors, such as enjoyment and self-efficacy, are significantly linked to PA levels. Despite some variations in findings, other research (Sebire et al., 2013) has also shown a strong relationship between various psychosocial variables and PA, suggesting that these factors play a consistent role in influencing activity levels among children and adolescents.

Motivation for gym participation: Previous studies have identified a range of motivational factors that encourage individuals to attend the gym. For example, some people are motivated to improve their physical performance or manage symptoms of depression (Awruk & Janowski, 2016). Others may be driven by body dissatisfaction, attending the gym to achieve specific physical results (McLachlan et al., 2009). Health and fitness professionals often cite the importance of competence and personal satisfaction in maintaining regular gym attendance (Caudwell & Keatley, 2016; Sibley & Bergman, 2018). Additionally, individuals may be motivated by self-awareness of their age and gender, influencing their decision to maintain fitness routines (Rapport et al., 2018). The gym environment also provides a space for individuals to build and reinforce their personal identities, as well as to improve both their physical and psychological health (Thomson & McAdoo, 2016). While these studies offer insights into what motivates people to go to the gym, there is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the barriers faced by gym-goers. Furthermore, there has been limited research on why some individuals do not continue gym activities over a long period. Understanding these barriers and the reasons for discontinuation is essential for developing strategies to promote sustained engagement in fitness activities.

In the context of Pakistan, several studies have examined the various roles and relationships between gyms and gym-goers. For example, Li et al. (2015) conducted research among women in Oman and Pakistan, finding that Pakistani men and women were motivated to attend the gym primarily for relaxation and to improve their appearance. Azhar et al. (2022) explored the motives and frequency of natural supplement and hormone use among Pakistani gym participants, revealing motivations such as increasing muscle size and strength, impressing the opposite gender, gaining popularity on TikTok, and attracting a boyfriend or girlfriend. Similarly, Jepson et al. (2012) compared Indian and Pakistani participants and found that motivations for engaging in physical activity included the social opportunities it provided, enjoyment, weight reduction, and improving mental and physical health, with role models also being influential. It was

noted that only a few people participated in physical activity for its own sake. Additionally, Nasir (2020) investigated the relationship between the portrayal of movie heroes and gym-goers in Pakistan, finding a positive correlation where gym-goers idealized heroes with particular body types and behavioral patterns, believing these depictions inspired them to join gyms.

Expanding beyond the Pakistani context, recent studies, Sharon-David et al. (2021) examined the motivations for gym participation among people with disabilities, while McKenzie et al. (2023) explored factors influencing community gym participation for young adults with cerebral palsy. Smyth et al. (2022) focused on the Green Gym Program, highlighting its impact on both physical health and environmental awareness. Skauge and Seippel (2022) discussed fitness clubs and gyms in the context of social inequality, providing insights into how access to gyms varies across different socioeconomic groups. Furthermore, Brown et al. (2022) identified techniques to increase gym membership purchases, while Ruano and Teixeira (2020) analyzed the role of diet plans in motivating gym members. Hall and Noonan (2023) examined the mental and physical well-being benefits associated with gym membership, reinforcing the holistic advantages of regular participation and Addolorato and Gimeno (2025) studied consumer satisfaction among gym participants.

While these studies provide insights into the motivations driving gym participation, there remains limited research on the barriers and factors that demotivate individuals from maintaining long-term gym attendance. This gap in the literature highlights the need to explore what discourages gym-goers from continuing their fitness journeys. In this context, the current study poses the following research question:

RQ1: What factors demotivate gym-goers in Pakistan from prolonging their gym participation?

Understanding these demotivators is crucial for developing strategies to enhance gym retention and promote a more active lifestyle in Pakistan.

Methods

This study uses a phenomenological qualitative research design to investigate the factors that discourage gym-goers in Pakistan from continuing their gym participation over the long term. Phenomenology is particularly suited to this study as it focuses on capturing the lived experiences of individuals, exploring the meaning they attribute to their gym attendance, and understanding the barriers they face. The goal is to delve into how gym-goers experience their gym journeys, including the initial motivations for joining, the challenges faced along the way, and their perceptions of what might lead to their re-engagement. A purposeful sampling method, specifically criterion sampling, was employed to recruit participants based on specific criteria (Patton, 2014). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain detailed insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives related to gym attendance.

Participants: A total of 21 participants were recruited for this study using specific inclusion criteria: each participant had to have attended a gym for a minimum of one month but no more than six months. This criterion ensured that participants had sufficient experience to provide meaningful insights into gym participation without the influence of long-term commitment factors. The study focused on fitness centers, which offer general physical fitness services such as weight training, cardiovascular exercises, and group fitness classes, excluding specialized facilities such as Pilates studios, boutique fitness studios, or yoga centers. Participants were selected from various cities across Pakistan to capture a diverse range of experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews lasting between 45 and 60 minutes, conducted over a period of four months, either face-to-face or online, depending on participant convenience. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Before the interviews, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights to confidentiality and withdrawal at any time. An interview guide, developed in line with the principles outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), helped maintain consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility to explore individual experiences in greater depth. To gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences, additional probing questions were also asked when necessary (Kvale, 1996). The original identities of the participants were protected by assigning each a code (P1-P21). Interviews were conducted in Urdu and later translated into English by bilingual specialists to ensure accurate translation. To accommodate the comfort and convenience of participants, interviews were conducted at locations of their choice, such as gyms, restaurants, universities, and other preferred venues. The interview guide included the following sample questions: (1) What initially motivated you to join the gym? (2) What factors influenced your decision to stop going to the gym? (3) Did you face any specific challenges or barriers that discouraged you from continuing gym participation? (4) In your opinion, what could gyms do differently to encourage long-term participation? (5) How do you feel about returning to the gym in the future, and what conditions would need to change for you to consider it?

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis was employed to explore the lived experiences of gym-goers in Pakistan and the factors that discourage their long-term participation. This approach was chosen because it allows for a flexible yet systematic examination of the interview data, enabling the identification of key themes and patterns that emerge across the participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The goal of thematic analysis in this study was to uncover

underlying factors, both individual and socio-cultural, that influence gym-goers' decisions to discontinue gym participation.

A two-level coding approach was utilized for the data analysis to thoroughly examine the interview transcripts. The first level involved open coding, which aimed to break the data into smaller, more manageable pieces and identify initial themes and categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This stage of analysis involved carefully dissecting the interview data to highlight distinct concepts, acting as foundational blocks of raw data. By closely examining these discrete parts and comparing similarities and differences, initial themes were identified. This process helped uncover recurring patterns in participants' responses, providing a preliminary understanding of the data. The second level of analysis used axial coding to delve deeper into the relationships between the themes that emerged during open coding. Axial coding focused on identifying connections and interactions among the initial themes, enabling the development of more abstract concepts that offered a deeper understanding of the underlying factors influencing gym participation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This method allowed the researcher to build a more cohesive narrative by linking related categories and synthesizing a comprehensive view of the participants' experiences. To ensure reliability and minimize researcher bias, the content analysis process involved two independent evaluators who independently coded the data. The inter-coder agreement coefficient was calculated to assess the level of consistency between the evaluators, with an acceptable level of agreement above 80%. In cases of disagreement, the evaluators discussed their interpretations until a consensus was reached. This process not only enhanced the reliability of the analysis but also provided a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. In addition, a third evaluator was occasionally consulted to provide peer validation of the themes developed during the analysis.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured by focusing on credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed. Credibility was established through member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to review and validate the accuracy of their interview transcripts and the initial interpretations. Transferability was addressed by providing a detailed description of the research context and participant demographics, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other settings. Dependability was achieved through an audit trail, documenting all research decisions and procedures to allow for replication or critique. Finally, confirmability was maintained by keeping a reflexive journal, in which the researcher documented personal reflections, potential biases, and decision-making processes throughout the study.

Table 1. Participants

#	Age	Duration of gym attendance	Education	City	Economic status	Intention to rejoin gym
P1	24	2 months	Bachelor's Degree	Karachi	Traditional job	Yes
P2	30	1 month	Master's Degree	Lahore	Self-employed	No
P3	27	4 months	Bachelor's Degree	Islamabad	Traditional job	Yes
P4	35	3 months	Intermediate	Quetta	Self-employed	No
P5	22	1.5 months	Bachelor's Degree	Faisalabad	Remote employee	Yes
P6	29	5 months	Master's Degree	Rawalpindi	Traditional job	No
P7	33	2.5 months	Bachelor's Degree	Multan	Self-employed	Yes
P8	26	3 months	Intermediate	Peshawar	Traditional job	Yes
P9	31	1 month	Master's Degree	Hyderabad	Traditional job	Yes
P10	28	4.5 months	Bachelor's Degree	Sialkot	Remote employee	No
P11	23	2 months	Bachelor's Degree	Gujranwala	Traditional job	Yes
P12	34	5 months	Master's Degree	Sargodha	Self-Employed	No
P13	21	1 month	Intermediate	Bahawalpur	Unemployed	Yes
P14	32	3.5 months	Bachelor's Degree	Sukkur	Unemployed	Yes
P15	25	4 months	Bachelor's Degree	Multan	Unemployed	Yes
P16	36	2 months	Intermediate	Abbottabad	Self-Employed	No
P17	29	1.5 months	Bachelor's Degree	Jhelum	Traditional job	Yes
P18	20	3 months	Intermediate	Sahiwal	Traditional job	No
P19	27	5 months	Bachelor's Degree	Okara	Unemployed	Yes
P20	22	1 month	Intermediate	Mirpur	Traditional job	No
P21	38	2.5 months	Master's Degree	Nawabshah	Self-Employed	Yes

Results

The results of this study reveal several key themes that highlight the factors discouraging long-term gym participation among individuals in Pakistan. Economic constraints emerged as a significant barrier, where high costs associated with gym memberships and inflationary pressures make sustained attendance difficult for many. Cultural and social norms, particularly in a conservative society, further limit gym access, especially for women, due to societal expectations and gender roles. Additionally, a lack of facilities, particularly in rural areas, reduces the opportunity for individuals to engage in regular gym activities. Time constraints also play a critical role, with many individuals struggling to balance work, education, and family responsibilities, leaving little time for consistent gym attendance. Furthermore, gym participation is often seen as a seasonal or temporary commitment, with many people joining for short-term goals such as weight loss for an event, and discontinuing once those objectives are met. Lastly, a lack of motivation

or visible results contributes to early dropout rates, as individuals may become discouraged if they do not see immediate progress or feel unsupported in their fitness journeys. These themes collectively illustrate the multifaceted barriers that impact gym retention in Pakistan, reflecting broader socio-economic and cultural dynamics.

Economic Constraints: High inflation and economic instability can make gym memberships a luxury that many may not afford for the long term. Financial constraints are a significant barrier.

With the cost of living going up so much, I've had to make some tough choices about where my money goes. Paying for a gym membership felt like an unnecessary luxury, especially when I have bills to pay and groceries to buy. I loved going, but in this economy, it just doesn't seem practical to spend on something that's not essential to survival [P20].

I was really committed to going to the gym, but when things got tight financially, it was the first thing I had to cut out. The monthly fees were just too high to keep up with, especially when I'm already struggling to make ends meet. I had to prioritize, and unfortunately, the gym didn't make the cut [P2].

Cultural and Social Norms: In a conservative and religious society, traditional values and gender roles might restrict women's access to gyms or influence their participation. Social stigma or lack of family support can also play a role.

As a woman, it's really challenging to maintain a gym routine, especially in a conservative community. People start talking, and sometimes even your own family doesn't fully support you. There's this constant pressure to conform to traditional roles, and going to the gym just doesn't fit into that picture. After a while, the social pressure becomes too much, and you start to wonder if it's worth the hassle [P4].

The gym environment can be really intimidating, especially for women. There's always this underlying feeling that it's not 'appropriate' for us to be working out in a mixed-gender space. The stares, the whispers—it's uncomfortable, and after a few experiences like that, many women just decide it's easier to stop going altogether [P9].

Lack of Facilities: Inadequate gym facilities or limited access to quality fitness centers, especially in rural areas, can discourage long-term commitment.

The gym near my home is really basic. The equipment is old, and there's hardly any space to move around. It's always overcrowded, and you have to wait forever to use a machine. I started to feel like it wasn't worth the time or money, and I lost the motivation to keep going. When the facilities don't meet your expectations, it's hard to stay committed [P10].

In my area, there are hardly any proper gyms, and the ones that do exist are far away and difficult to get to. Traveling so far just to work out isn't practical, especially when I have other responsibilities. After trying to make it work for a while, I eventually gave up because the inconvenience was too much to handle [P17].

Time Constraints: With many individuals juggling work, education, and family responsibilities, finding time for regular gym visits can be challenging.

Between my full-time job and taking care of my family, there's barely any time left in the day for myself. I used to go to the gym regularly, but as my responsibilities grew, it became impossible to keep up. The time commitment was just too demanding, and I had to prioritize other things.

The gym became one of those things I wanted to do but couldn't find the time for anymore [P4].

I was really excited about going to the gym at first, but balancing my studies and a part-time job made it incredibly difficult. By the time I was done with my day, I was too exhausted to think about working out. The gym started to feel like another obligation, and eventually, I had to let it go because there simply weren't enough hours in the day [P21].

Seasonal or Temporary Commitment: Some individuals might start going to the gym as a temporary solution to a specific problem, like weight loss before an event, and discontinue once the goal is achieved.

I joined the gym because I wanted to lose some weight before my cousin's wedding. It was a short-term goal, and once the wedding was over, I didn't see the point in continuing. The urgency was gone, and so was my motivation. It was never about a long-term commitment to fitness; it was just about reaching a specific goal, and once that was done, I didn't have a reason to keep going [P1].

For me, the gym was just a way to get in shape quickly for a particular event. I wasn't thinking about it as a long-term lifestyle change, so once I achieved my short-term goal, I didn't feel the need to continue. It was more of a temporary fix, and without that immediate purpose, I lost interest in going back [P18].

Lack of Motivation or Results: If individuals do not see immediate results or lack motivation from gym staff or their fitness community, they may lose interest and quit.

I went to the gym for several months, hoping to see some real changes in my body, but when the results didn't come as quickly as I expected, I started to feel discouraged. The progress was slow, and without noticeable improvements, it became harder to keep pushing myself. Eventually, the lack of visible results made me question why I was even bothering, and I lost the motivation to continue [P16].

The trainers at my gym didn't really provide much support or encouragement. I felt like I was just another number, and without someone pushing me or acknowledging my efforts, it was easy to lose interest. I started skipping sessions, and before long, I stopped going altogether. The lack of motivation from both myself and the gym staff made it hard to stay committed [P7].

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the factors that discourage long-term gym participation among individuals in Pakistan, focusing on a range of socio-economic,

cultural, and motivational barriers. The findings indicate that economic constraints, cultural and social norms, lack of facilities, time limitations, temporary commitments, and a lack of motivation or visible results are key factors influencing gym dropout rates. These results underscore the complex interplay between financial challenges, societal expectations, and personal motivations that hinder sustained engagement in physical fitness activities. Understanding these barriers is crucial for developing targeted strategies to improve gym retention rates, such as making memberships more affordable, creating culturally sensitive fitness environments, and enhancing motivation through tailored programs. Such efforts could significantly enhance public health outcomes by fostering a more inclusive and supportive fitness culture in Pakistan.

The results of this study can be interpreted through the lens of SDT, which emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—in promoting sustained engagement in activities like gym participation (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). Many participants cited economic constraints as a primary reason for discontinuing gym membership, which can be linked to unmet needs for autonomy and competence. When financial resources are limited, individuals face reduced opportunities to choose gym participation freely, thereby undermining their sense of autonomy (Ryan et al., 2009; Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002). Additionally, financial difficulties hinder the ability to consistently invest in gym memberships, proper equipment, or fitness-related resources, which diminishes their sense of competence. This finding is supported by empirical evidence showing that financial barriers significantly impact access to fitness resources and long-term engagement in physical activities (Marwat et al., 2021). Moreover, these financial constraints can perpetuate a cycle of inactivity, as limited access to resources often leads to fewer visible results, further discouraging participation (Skaug & Seippel, 2022). Addressing these economic barriers by offering affordable membership options or financial support could enhance autonomy and improve gym retention.

Cultural and social norms, particularly those affecting women in conservative settings, also align with SDT by highlighting the barriers to fulfilling the need for relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The results indicate that cultural and social norms, especially in conservative settings, are significant barriers affecting gym participation. Traditional gender roles and societal expectations limit access to gyms, particularly for women, thereby restricting their ability to build social connections and feel a sense of belonging within the fitness community (Ryan & Deci, 2002). For instance, in conservative societies, the stigma associated with women engaging in physical fitness activities often isolates them, depriving them of the social support essential for long-term engagement. These findings are consistent with Burton et al. (2021), who noted that cultural restrictions often serve as significant obstacles to women's participation in fitness activities. In alignment with

existing literature, the lack of inclusive gym environments that accommodate diverse cultural and social needs exacerbates this issue (Fişne & Hasaan, 2020; Pashaie et al., 2024). To address these issues, gyms must focus on creating safe, gender-sensitive spaces to foster inclusivity and relatedness for women. Providing women-only workout areas, flexible timings, or culturally appropriate fitness programs can help mitigate these barriers and enhance their motivation to continue gym participation.

SDT suggests that competence, or the ability to effectively engage in and benefit from an activity, is essential for sustained motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The study's results reveal that inadequate gym facilities hinder participants' ability to achieve their fitness goals and maintain engagement. Insufficient equipment, lack of space, or poor maintenance of gyms leave participants feeling unmotivated and unable to make progress toward their fitness objectives, as documented in prior studies (Yu et al., 2022). This aligns with findings from Yildiz et al. (2018) which suggest that enhancing gym infrastructure plays a crucial role in promoting gym attendance and satisfaction. Improving facility quality, offering modern equipment, and maintaining clean environments are vital for addressing these competence-related barriers and improving overall gym experiences.

Time constraints reflect challenges in satisfying the need for competence and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The busy schedules of participants, combined with competing professional and personal responsibilities, leave little room for fitness activities. This finding aligns with Vergolini et al. (2014) who emphasized that time management is a key barrier to gym participation, particularly in urban settings. To mitigate these constraints, gyms could adopt more flexible schedules, offer quick and efficient workout programs, or provide virtual fitness options to accommodate time-strapped individuals. Addressing this barrier would empower participants to integrate fitness into their daily routines, enhancing their autonomy and competence.

According to SDT, extrinsic motivations, such as short-term goals, are less likely to sustain long-term engagement (Vallerand & Ratelle, 2002). The results indicate that many individuals join gyms with temporary or event-specific goals, which may lead to discontinuation once those goals are achieved. This is supported by research showing that extrinsic goals can lead to decreased motivation once the external incentive is removed (Caz et al., 2021; Jeffery et al., 2003). Moreover, the lack of visible results or progress further demotivates individuals, as they perceive their efforts to be ineffective (Stringer & Owen, 2023). This emphasizes the importance of helping members set realistic, sustainable fitness goals and providing consistent feedback on their progress. Gyms could incorporate progress tracking, personalized coaching, and motivational workshops to foster intrinsic motivation and promote long-term commitment.

By examining the factors influencing gym dropout rates through the lens of SDT, this study provides valuable insights into the socio-economic, cultural, and

motivational barriers faced by individuals in Pakistan. Addressing these barriers requires a multifaceted approach that combines financial support, culturally sensitive gym environments, improved facilities, and targeted motivational strategies. Comparing the results with existing literature underscores the importance of addressing the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to sustain engagement in physical activities. Future interventions should focus on creating inclusive, supportive, and goal-oriented fitness environments to enhance public health and promote long-term gym participation.

SDT highlights the importance of fulfilling the need for competence and autonomy to maintain intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Our study found that a lack of visible results or progress significantly impacts motivation and leads to gym dropout. This is consistent with findings that indicate perceived ineffectiveness or lack of progress can undermine motivation (Fişne & Hasaan, 2021). Implementing regular feedback, progress tracking, and personalized support can help address these issues and enhance members' sense of competence, thereby supporting continued gym participation.

Future research should explore the social and cultural influences on sports participation in different regions of Pakistan, as cultural norms and access to resources may vary significantly across urban and rural settings. Investigating the experiences of marginalized groups, including women and low-income populations, could provide a deeper understanding of the intersectional barriers to physical activity. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could examine the long-term impact of interventions designed to address economic and cultural barriers, shedding light on their effectiveness in sustaining gym participation. Comparative research across similar socio-cultural contexts in other countries could also offer valuable insights into region-specific strategies for promoting fitness engagement.

Conclusion

Kaynaklar

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This study provides valuable insights into the factors that contribute to the discontinuation of gym participation in Pakistan, using SDT as a theoretical framework. The results reveal that economic constraints, cultural and social norms, lack of facilities, time limitations, temporary commitments, and lack of motivation or visible results are significant barriers affecting gym retention. These findings underscore the importance of addressing basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—to foster sustained engagement in physical activities.

Economic constraints highlight the need for affordable gym membership options and financial support to alleviate the burden on individuals and enhance their sense of autonomy. Cultural and social norms suggest that creating inclusive and supportive gym environments is crucial for promoting relatedness, particularly for women and other marginalized groups. The lack of facilities and time constraints point to the necessity of improving access to quality fitness resources and accommodating individuals' busy schedules. Seasonal or temporary commitments indicate the need for long-term motivational strategies beyond short-term goals. Finally, addressing the lack of motivation or visible results requires enhancing feedback mechanisms and support systems within gyms to boost individuals' sense of competence.

Overall, the implications of this study are significant for gym operators, policymakers, and fitness professionals. By implementing strategies that align with SDT principles, such as offering affordable memberships, fostering inclusive environments, improving facilities, and providing ongoing support, stakeholders can enhance gym retention and encourage sustained physical activity participation. Future research should explore these factors in greater depth and across different contexts to develop a comprehensive understanding of how to effectively support gym-goers and promote long-term engagement in physical fitness.

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