The theory of planned behavior (TPB) has been shown to be effective in examining the antecedents of physical activity behavior. According to the theory, physical activity behavior is determined by intentions, a motivational construct. Intentions are a function of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (PBC). Attitudes reflect a person’s predisposition towards engaging in the behavior. Subjective norms are an individual’s perceptions that significant others want them to participate in the behavior. PBC reflects the influence of personal capacities and constraints regarding the behavior. Together these predictors are hypothesized to affect behavior via the mediation of intentions. Studies applying the TPB to physical activity behavior have supported its major premises in adults and children. One major tenet of the theory is that these decision making processes are universal, but no studies have tested this generalizability hypothesis across cultures. The present study aimed to test the cross-cultural generalizability of the measurement and structural parameters of the TPB among youth from five culturally diverse national groups in a physical activity context. School pupils from the United Kingdom (N = 432; Boys = 198, Girls = 234; M age = 13.96, SD = 1.51), Estonia (N = 268; Boys = 117, Girls = 151; M age = 15.04, SD = .91), Greece (N = 150; Boys = 65, Girls = 85; M age = 4.35, SD = .80), Hungary (N = 235; Boys = 114, Girls = 121; M age = 14.01, SD = .99), and Singapore (N = 133; Boys = 66, Girls = 67; M age = 13.32, SD = .47) completed the TPB measures of attitudes, subjective norms, PBC, and intentions for physical activity. Five weeks later, participants completed self-report measures of physical activity behavior. Confirmatory factor analyses revealed well-fitting models in samples from the United Kingdom (CFI = .955, NFI = .939, RMSEA = .063), Estonia (CFI = .974, NFI = .966, RMSEA = .048), Greece (CFI = .987, NFI = .983, RMSEA = .029), Hungarian (CFI = .979, NFI = .972, RMSEA = .035), and Singapore (CFI = 1.000, NFI = 1.000, RMSEA = .001) with minimal variations in the measurement parameters across cultures. Multi-sample structural equation models also fit the data well in each sample and revealed few significant cross-cultural differences in the structural relations among the TPB constructs. Attitudes predicted intentions in all samples (Beta range = .300 to .573) while the effect of the subjective norms on intention was non-significant in all but the Hungarian sample (Beta = .243). Conversely, the effect of PBC on intentions was significant (Beta range = .302 to .573) in all but the Hungarian sample. Findings support the generalizability of the measures and pattern of effects for the TPB among young people in a physical activity context and suggest that this model is a robust representation of the decision-making processes that underlie physical activity for health.

Keywords: Children, Applied Sport Psychology, Physical Activity and Health

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