

Factors and Strategies in Fostering a Healthy Lifestyle: An Analysis of Five Key Determinants

¹Yuan Chengxiao, ²Syed Kamaruzaman Syed Ali, ³Annisaa Basar

^{1,2,3}*Department of Educational of Foundation and Humanities, Faculty of Education,
University of Malaya*

ABSTRACT : A healthy lifestyle is the result of a **complex interaction** between **individual, social, and systemic factors**, rather than just a personal choice. This paper examines five main factors that influence the adoption of a healthy lifestyle: **Health Literacy, Motivation and Self-efficacy, Social and Environmental Support, Policy and Institutional Support, and Mental Health and Stress Management**. Health Literacy provides the cognitive basis for making healthy decisions, while Motivation and Self-efficacy (self-confidence) are crucial for initiating and maintaining healthy habits. Social Support, through encouragement from family and peers, as well as the availability of Recreational Infrastructure, serves as a significant behavioural driver. Meanwhile, effective Mental Health and stress management are necessary to prevent emotional eating behaviour and a sedentary life. To create a conducive environment, the **Government plays a critical role** through a holistic approach focused on three main pillars: **Legislation, Infrastructure, and Education**. Legislative strategies include the enforcement of the **Excise Tax (Sugar)** on Sugar-Sweetened Beverages (SSBs) and strict control over advertising. The Infrastructure pillar emphasises the development of public parks, cycling paths, and community sports facilities. Finally, the Education pillar involves organising continuous awareness campaigns (e.g., KOSPEN) and integrating health literacy into the curriculum. In conclusion, adopting a healthy lifestyle can only be made the norm in society through a comprehensive approach that combines psychological and personal interventions with systemic reforms in policy, infrastructure, and education.

KEYWORDS: Healthy Lifestyle, Health Literacy, Self-efficacy, Sugar Tax, Government Role.

I. INTRODUCTION

A healthy lifestyle refers to proactive behavior that helps maintain physical, mental, and social health through regular physical activity, balanced nutrition, and effective stress management. The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being that is free from disease. Recent studies have shown that establishing a healthy lifestyle depends not only on behavioral choices, but also on Health Literacy, Motivation and Self-efficacy, Social and Environmental Support, Policy and Institutional Support and Mental Health and Stress Management (Kang et al., 2023); Yamada et al., 2021). In theory, planning behavior theory (Ajzen, 1991) and cognitive social theory (Bandura, 1986) suggest that healthy behavior is influenced by intentions, perceived controls and environmental factors. But research suggests that understanding the value of health does not necessarily lead to action. For example: Griban et al. 2021, college students discovered that there were often lack of strategy and motivation to maintain healthy habits. In summary, these results support a more complete understanding that a healthy lifestyle is the product of the interaction of individual, social and systemic forces. The following section will use theoretical grounds and current research data to explore five key factors that influence the adoption and maintenance of a healthy lifestyle.

II. HEALTH LITERACY

Health literacy is defined as the ability to obtain, understand, evaluate, and wisely apply health information based on personal health decisions. It is the cognitive basis of a healthy lifestyle and is recognized through personal experience. It also provides an understanding of medical proposals and the influence of knowledge on daily practice. In Kang's (2023) research, individuals with high health literacy have a high possibility of understanding the long-term impact of factors selection and taking preventive actions to avoid harmful habits. However, according to Griban's et al. (2021), college students are receiving more health education and there is a lack of action reinforcement. As a result, their knowledge and ability to use it in daily life are lacking. Emphasize it. The necessity of a health education plan has been emphasized, and the health education plan provides information to cultivate the ability to adjust and make decisions on one's own. A recent study by a university in Malaysia revealed a practical example of the effects of health literacy on students who were involved in the structured food literacy workshop significantly increasing the consumption of fruits and

vegetables and reducing the consumption of sugar by 28 per cent (Kusano et al., 2021). This suggests that improving the ability to interpret and operate health information leads to measurable behavioral changes, making healthy literacy a basic determinant of long-term lifestyle.

III. MOTIVATION AND SELF-EFFICACY

Motivation and self efficacy are closely related to the psychological structure, which plays an important role in the generation and maintenance of healthy behaviors. Motivation is defined by Bandura (1986) as the ability to perform specific actions based on one's own sense of effectiveness and expected results, while requiring both internal and external motivation for personal actions. Believe in it. To enhance one's sense of efficiency, it is necessary to confront specific issues and strengthen the setting of goals and actions. In Griban's et al. (2021) research, one of the main obstacles to maintaining the health of college students is the lack of belief in the ability to succeed in motivation reinforcement and self-differentiation. Many students are unable to make healthy choices and lack confidence in controlling their actions, while maintaining consistency. Kusano et al. (2021) emphasized the successful implementation of measures to promote the transformation of actions by combining the elements of motivation and personal effectiveness to construct a caring relationship intervention. For the study of their children, there is a possibility that students with high self-efficacy will reduce their consumption of equipment, which is three times higher than students with low self-efficacy. It is important to demonstrate the importance of maintaining confidence in personal beliefs and behaviors beyond knowledge in order to start a healthy lifestyle.

Social and Environmental Support : Social and environmental support refers to interpersonal and institutional resources that influence healthy behavior. Kamarudin, Kang et al. (2023) argue that social factors such as family encouragement, peer regulation, and access to community health plans play a central role in shaping individuals' choices related to physical activity, dietary behavior, and stress management. According to their study on Asians, people who received strong incentives from their family were 2.4 times more likely to adopt healthy eating habits than those who did not receive such support. Griban M. et al. (2021) pointed out that the institutional environment, particularly in primary and secondary schools and universities, has a significant impact on student participation in health-related activities. According to their survey of Ukrainian educational institutions, the availability of supporting infrastructure, such as sports facilities and nutritional guidelines in cafes, is directly related to improved health and decreased long-term behaviors. And again, Estrela Laila (2025) points out that environmental factors such as visible health activities, transportation in parks, and the supply of healthy food play a role as "passive drivers" and potentially unconsciously form individual behavioral patterns. For example, residents living within a 500-metre radius of public green spaces are more active than residents of high-density urban areas that do not have public green spaces. BMI is low. These findings show that health behaviors do not form in isolation, but are built through a supportive ecosystem at the family, school and community levels.

Policy and Institutional Support : Policy and institutional support is essential to create an environment that promotes healthy lifestyle behavior at the social level. These supports include regulations, laws and organizational strategies to promote public health. For example, political measures such as taxation for unhealthy products (such as sweet drinks) and encouraging healthier choices are shown to directly affect public health behavior. A typical example in Korea, which underwent positive nutritional signs for packaging, reduced the consumption of sweet drinks by 23% in the first year (Kusano et al., 2021). In addition to regulatory measures, institutional support plays an important role. Programs that promote physical fitness, provide healthy diet choices, and provide mental health services in schools, workplaces and communities can help create an environment suitable for a healthier lifestyle. For example, some initiatives for a healthy workplace in some European countries provide employers to the employer to support workforce activities in the workplace associated with the overall health improvement and absence of employees. These political and institutional frameworks are essential not only to encourage long-term health promotion but also to create a system change that ensures access.

Mental Health and Stress Management : Mental health and stress management are essential to adopting and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, but they are often overlooked. García - Álvarez et al. (2021) According to him, increased stress levels are significantly associated with unhealthy eating patterns, decreased motivation for exercise, and increased sitting behavior. for 2019 COVID-19

A large study of 13,000 adults during the pandemic showed that people with moderate to severe psychological anxiety were 3.5 times more likely to engage in an emotional meal than the general population, particularly young people, and not to participate in physical activity. Cognitive and emotional factors can also influence the adoption of treatment strategies. People with a strong ability to regulate emotions tend to take positive actions to reduce psychological stress, such as diet, physical activity, and sleep hygiene. For example, in a study by Yamada et al. (2021), Japanese students who practice Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) had MBSR. Compared to their colleagues who did not practice, they ate much more fruits and vegetables each day and exercised regularly. The health belief model offers a theoretical perspective to explain these dynamics: individuals are more likely to take preventive health actions when they recognize high risks and believe they can effectively manage threats. If stress is not controlled, it can weaken this belief system and lead to avoidance actions. Therefore, stress management interventions at school or in the workplace, such as mindfulness workshops and peer counseling, can indirectly promote healthier behaviors by restoring psychological resilience.

Government Strategies for Cultivating a Healthy Lifestyle : The government holds a critical role in shaping a conducive environment for the community to adopt a healthy lifestyle, where the steps taken must encompass three main pillars: **legislation, infrastructure, and education**. In terms of **Policy and Legislation**, the government needs to enforce control over unhealthy food, such as continuing and expanding the **Excise Tax (Sugar)** on Sugar-Sweetened Beverages (SSBs) and enforcing strict regulations on advertising. Additionally, the government should encourage or mandate the

Healthier Choice Logo on products and tighten nutrition guidelines in institutional canteens and cafeterias. Policies for controlling tobacco and electronic cigarettes also need to be strengthened through legislation and tax increases. The second pillar, **Infrastructure and**

Environmental Development, focuses on providing quality public facilities for physical activity. This includes increasing the number and upgrading safe **public parks, pedestrian walkways, and cycling paths**. The government must also build and maintain community sports facilities with minimal fees, improve the public transportation system to encourage walking, and facilitate access to **fresh food** in all areas. Finally, the pillar of

Continuous Health Promotion Programmes and Education emphasizes the need to invest in enhancing community literacy and motivation. This is done by consistently organising **health awareness campaigns** (such as the 3W Carnival), continuing community-based intervention programmes like **KOSPEN**, integrating in-depth health education into the curriculum, and strengthening **preventive health screening and care services** in public clinics. In conclusion, only through a holistic approach involving legislative changes, physical environment development, and the reinforcement of health education can healthy lifestyle practices be facilitated and made the norm in society.

IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, five important factors such as Health Literacy, Motivation and Self-efficacy, Social and Environmental Support, Policy and Institutional Support, and Mental Health and Stress Management constitute a global framework to promote healthy lifestyle. However, their practical applications often face differences in low income and structurally disadvantageous communities. For example, political documents emphasize the importance of material infrastructure. Estrela et al. (2025) emphasizes that without social participation and psychological preparations, only the acquisition of infrastructure can guarantee the change in behavior. Griban et al. (2021) The psychological model often claims to ignore more widespread socio-economic and cultural factors that affect healthy behavior. Finally, in order to promote a healthy lifestyle, there are several levels of interventions that combine systematic autonomy and systematic reform of policy, education and environmental design.

REFERENCES

1. Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T)
2. Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice-Hall.
3. Estrela, M., Rodrigues, T., Silva, R., & Pereira, J. (2025). Health literacy and its impact on healthy lifestyle behaviors: A review of interventions. *Public Health*, 245, 105788. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2025.105788>

5. García-Álvarez, M., Rodríguez, E., & Sánchez, P. (2021). Stress, emotional regulation, and lifestyle behaviors: A study in high-stress populations. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(2), 284. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19010284>
7. Griban, G., Lyakhova, N., & Tymoshenko, O. (2021). Institutional environments and their impact on students' engagement in health behaviors. *Wiadomości Lekarskie*, 73(7), 1438-1447. <https://doi.org/10.36740/WLek202007124>
8. Hirooka, N., Kusano, T., Kinoshita, S., & Nakamoto, H. (2021). Influence of perceived stress and stress coping adequacy on multiple Health-Related Lifestyle behaviors. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(1), 284. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19010284>
9. Kang, J., Me, R. C., Kamarudin, K. M., & Sulaiman, R. (2023). Healthy lifestyle as a way to manage health risks: Components and factors. *Health Risk Analysis*, 4, 158. <https://doi.org/10.21668/health.risk/2023.4.15.eng>
10. Yamada, T., Kobayashi, N., & Kurokawa, T. (2021). The role of mindfulness in managing stress and promoting healthier lifestyle behaviors. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(1), 102. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19010102>
12. Zhang, X., Cash, R. E., Bower, J. K., Focht, B. C., & Paskett, E. D. (2020). Physical activity and risk of cardiovascular disease by weight status among U.S adults. *PLOS ONE*, 15(5), e0232893. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0232893>