


## The Application of Self-Determination Theory in Psychological Counseling Process

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### Makale Bilgileri/Article Information

Tür-Type: Araştırma makalesi-Research article  
Geliş tarihi-Date of submission: 02. 09. 2024  
Kabul tarihi-Date of acceptance: 31. 10. 2024  
Yayın tarihi-Date of publication: 31. 10. 2024

### Hakemlik-Review

Hakem sayısı-Reviewers: İki Dış Hakem-Two  
External  
Değerlendirme-Rewiev: Çift Taraflı Kör  
Hakemlik-Double-blind

### Etik/Ethics

Etik beyan- Ethical statement: Bu çalışmanın  
hazırlanma sürecinde etik ilkelere uyulmuştur.  
Benzerlik taraması- Plagiarism checks  
Yapıldı-İntihal.net-Yes-İntihal.net  
Etik bildirim- Complaints  
[ictimaiyatdergi@gmail.com](mailto:ictimaiyatdergi@gmail.com)

### Çıkar çatışması-Conflict of interest

Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.  
The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no  
conflict of interest

### Finansman-Grant Support

Herhangi bir fon, hibe veya başka bir destek  
alınmamıştır.  
No funds, grants, or other support was  
received.

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### Abstract

Self Determination Theory (SDT) is an important theoretical framework used in psychological counseling to increase intrinsic motivation, strengthen psychological well-being and support behavioural changes. This study examines the applications and effects of SDT in psychological counseling in detail. SDT focuses on the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness to increase the intrinsic motivation of individuals. Meeting these basic needs has positive effects on the psychological well-being of clients. SDT applications in psychological counseling stand out with their effectiveness in increasing client engagement and commitment to therapy. The autonomy-supportive approaches of SDT encourage clients to participate more actively in the therapy processes, which positively affects therapeutic outcomes. Research shows that SDT increases clients' intrinsic motivation and this motivation leads to high success rates in therapeutic processes. In the study, the application examples and case studies section shows how SDT is applied in various therapeutic contexts and what results it yields. The case studies illustrate how SDT supports clients' psychological well-being and is effective in behavioural change processes. Clinical research and meta-analyses provide important findings supporting effectiveness of SDT. In conclusion, SDT is an effective approach in psychological counseling to increase clients' intrinsic motivation, strengthen their psychological well-being and support long-term changes.

**Keywords:** Self-Determination Theory, autonomy, competence, relatedness, counseling, application.

### Öz Belirleme Kuramının Psikolojik Danışma Sürecinde Kullanımı

#### Öz

Öz Belirleme Kuramı (ÖBK), psikolojik danışmada içsel motivasyonu artırma, psikolojik iyi oluşu güçlendirme ve davranışsal değişimleri destekleme amacıyla kullanılan önemli bir teorik çerçevedir. Bu çalışma, ÖBK'nın psikolojik danışma sürecindeki uygulamalarını ve etkilerini detaylı bir şekilde incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Deci ve Ryan ÖBK'da, bireylerin içsel motivasyonlarını artırmak için özerklik, yeterlik ve ilişkili olma ihtiyaçlarına odaklanmaktadır. Bu temel ihtiyaçların karşılanması, danışanların psikolojik iyilik halleri üzerinde olumlu etkiler yaratmaktadır. Psikolojik danışmada ÖBK uygulamaları, danışan katılımını ve terapiye bağlılığını artırma konusundaki etkililiği ile öne çıkmaktadır. ÖBK'nın özerkliği destekleyici yaklaşımları, danışanların terapi sürecine daha aktif katılımını teşvik etmekte ve bu durum terapötik sonuçları olumlu yönde etkilemektedir. Araştırmalar, ÖBK'nın danışanların içsel motivasyonlarını artırdığını ve bu motivasyonun terapötik süreçlerde yüksek başarı oranları sağladığını göstermektedir. Çalışmada yer alan, uygulama örnekleri ve vaka incelemeleri bölümü, ÖBK'nın çeşitli terapötik bağlamlarda nasıl uygulandığını ve elde edilen sonuçları göstermektedir. Örnek vakalar, ÖBK'nın danışanların psikolojik iyi oluşlarını nasıl desteklediğini ve davranışsal değişim süreçlerinde nasıl etkili olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Klinik araştırmalar ve meta-analizler ise ÖBK'nın genel geçerliliğini ve etkinliğini destekleyen önemli bulgular sunmaktadır. Sonuç olarak ÖBK'nın, psikolojik danışmada, danışanların içsel motivasyonlarını artırma, psikolojik iyi oluşlarını güçlendirme ve uzun vadeli değişimlerini destekleme konusunda etkili bir yaklaşım olduğu düşünülmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Öz Belirleme Kuramı, özerklik, yeterlik, ilişkili olma, psikolojik danışma, uygulama.

### Atıf- Citation (APA)

Güleç, Z. (2024). The application of self-determination theory in psychological counseling process. *İçtimaiyat*, Cilt 8, Türk Eğitim Sisteminde Değişimler ve Yeni Eğilimler Özel Sayısı, pp. 201-2012. <https://doi.org/10.33709/ictimaiyat.1541995>.

## **1. Introduction**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a comprehensive theory developed by Deci and Ryan (1985: 29) that explains the nature of human motivation. SDT argues that individuals can lead a healthier and more satisfying life by meeting their intrinsic motivation and basic psychological needs. This theory provides an important framework, especially in psychological counseling and therapeutic processes, to increase clients' intrinsic motivation, increase their life satisfaction and encourage their participation in therapy.

At the centre of SDT are three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. Autonomy refers to individuals' ability to make their own decisions and direct their behaviour freely, while competence strengthens individuals' belief that they can successfully complete a task. Relatedness, on the other hand, encompasses individuals' needs to establish social bonds and to feel belonging (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 237). The fulfilment of these three basic needs leads to the strengthening of individuals' intrinsic motivation and more satisfying life experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2008: 189).

SDT has an important role especially in psychological counseling processes. By using the principles of SDT, counselors can increase clients' intrinsic motivation and thus support their participation in the therapy process (Vansteenkiste & Sheldon, 2006: 441). The theory makes the counseling experience more effective by enabling clients not only to address their current problems but also to be more active in their own decision-making processes. For example, by providing autonomy support, clients are encouraged to set their own goals; this allows individuals to own the therapy process and direct their personal development processes more effectively (Deci et al., 1991: 338).

Research shows that SDT, unlike other motivational approaches used in the counseling process, activates the individual's internal resources and clients experience more sustainable changes (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006: 296). In this context, SDT helps to achieve more satisfying therapeutic outcomes by contributing to individuals becoming actors of their own lives.

SDT suggests that individuals experience higher levels of motivation, creativity and psychological well-being when their basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) are met (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 73). In this context, the theory aims for counselors to increase their clients' intrinsic motivation by providing autonomy support. Therefore, SDT goes beyond being just a motivation theory and allows individuals to take an active role in self-management and personal development processes. In the psychological counseling process, understanding and increasing the motivation of clients increases the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions. SDT helps clients not only to solve their problems but also to develop their ability to make their own decisions. In this context, the use of the theory in psychological counseling creates the necessary environment for clients to mobilise their inner resources.

The study aims to examine the use of SDT in psychological counseling, the basic concepts of the theory, application examples and its benefits in the counseling process. At the same time, by addressing the strengths and weaknesses of SDT, it will evaluate the contributions of the theory to counseling processes. This article also aims to discuss how Self-Determination Theory can be used in counseling, the effects and limitations of this use.

## **2. Basic Concepts of Self-Determination Theory**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) focuses on three basic psychological needs to understand human motivation and behaviour: autonomy, competence and relatedness. These three basic needs are considered as the main elements that determine the healthy psychological functioning and motivational processes of individuals (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 70).

*Autonomy* refers to the need of individuals to manage their own behaviour in line with their own values and interests. When individuals make decisions according to their own wishes and choices, their intrinsic motivation is strengthened and they experience a higher psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1991: 254). In psychological counseling, when clients' sense of autonomy is supported, their participation in therapy increases and they become more motivated for change (Ryan et al., 2011: 279). Autonomy support allows clients to set their own goals and develop their own strategies to achieve these goals.

*Competence* refers to the need for individuals to feel themselves competent and effective. The belief that a person can successfully complete a task directly affects the level of motivation (Deci et al., 1991: 327). The feeling of competence is related to the individual's feeling of competence and success in a certain field. In psychological counseling, it is possible to strengthen clients' sense of competence by instilling confidence in them and providing positive feedback (Williams et al., 1996: 122). When competence is supported, clients show more participation and play an active role in the therapeutic process.

*Relatedness* refers to the need of individuals to establish meaningful social bonds with others and to belong. Social connections allow the individual to feel belonging to a group and receive support (Ryan & Deci, 2002: 17). When clients feel accepted and valued in the therapeutic process, their commitment to therapy increases and they are motivated to change (Baumeister & Leary, 1995: 515). Meeting the need for relatedness enables the client to establish a relationship of trust with the counselor and increases the effectiveness of the therapy.

These three basic needs support the individual's motivational system and allow for more positive and permanent changes in psychological counseling processes. In particular, SDT offers an approach that empowers clients by understanding their motivational needs and mobilises their inner resources. In this context, the applicability of SDT in psychological counseling helps clients to participate in the therapy process in depth by increasing their intrinsic motivation.

## **3. Application of Self-Determination Theory in Psychological Counseling**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is used as a powerful tool in psychological counseling and therapy processes to increase motivation and mobilise clients' internal resources. The basic principles of SDT aim to increase clients' participation in the therapy process and their general well-being by meeting their psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000: 254). The use of SDT in the psychological counseling process can be examined under the titles of supporting autonomy, strengthening sense of competence, establishing relationality and trust, increasing intrinsic motivation, practical applications and intervention strategies.

### **3.1. Supporting autonomy**

Meeting clients' autonomy needs plays a critical role in increasing their commitment to the therapy process. Counselors allow clients to set their own goals and choose their own ways to

achieve these goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 75). This approach encourages clients to participate in therapy in accordance with their own values and interests. When clients are enabled to play an active role in decision-making processes, their intrinsic motivation is strengthened and the therapeutic process becomes more effective (Gagné et al., 2022: 256).

### **3.2. Strengthening the sense of competence**

Increasing clients' sense of competence can help to achieve successful results in the therapy process. Giving clients confidence that they can succeed in certain tasks and providing positive feedback in this process strengthens their sense of competence (Deci et al., 1991: 331). When clients increase their belief in their own abilities during therapy, they show more participation and are more motivated to achieve therapeutic goals (Williams et al., 1996: 117).

### **3.3. Establishing a relationship of relatedness and trust**

Relatedness involves clients establishing a meaningful and supportive relationship with their therapists. Clients' feeling accepted and valued increases the effectiveness of the therapeutic process (Baumeister & Leary, 1995: 526). Counselors establish a trustworthy and empathic relationship with the clients and make them feel open and comfortable. This increases the chances of clients to adapt to the therapy process better and to experience deeper change (Ryan & Deci, 2008: 191).

### **3.4. Increasing intrinsic motivation**

SDT offers various strategies to increase clients' intrinsic motivation. Counselors can strengthen clients' intrinsic motivation by supporting them to set goals in accordance with their interests and values. They also help clients develop the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their personal goals (Vansteenkiste & Sheldon, 2006: 15). Intrinsic motivation enables clients to participate more actively in the therapy process and to be more open to therapeutic changes.

### **3.5. Practical applications and intervention strategies**

Various intervention strategies can be used to increase the applicability of SDT in counseling. For example, counselors can help clients set and achieve their own goals by using autonomy-supportive techniques. They can also increase clients' experiences of success through competence development strategies and strengthen therapeutic relationships by providing relatedness (Deci et al., 1991: 344). These strategies contribute to clients experiencing more satisfying and lasting changes in the therapy process.

These approaches show how SDT can be used effectively in psychological counseling processes and how it can have positive effects on clients' psychological well-being. The correct application of the basic principles of SDT enables clients to reach higher levels of motivation and experience more meaningful changes in the therapy process.

## **4. Application Examples and Case Studies**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is effectively used in psychological counseling with various application examples and case studies. In this section, by presenting real case examples where SDT principles are applied, how the theory is applied in counseling processes and the results obtained will be examined.

Many studies have shown the effects of autonomy-supportive strategies on increasing clients' motivation and strengthening their participation in therapy. For example, in a study conducted by Gagné et al. (2022: 257), it was found that clients who were worked with an autonomy-supportive approach showed more commitment to therapy goals and achieved higher success. The counselor adopted an approach that allowed clients to set their own goals and develop personal strategies to achieve these goals. As a result, the clients' intrinsic motivation was strengthened and their participation in the therapy process increased. Interventions aimed at increasing the sense of competence support clients to achieve more effective and satisfactory results in the therapy process. In a study conducted by Deci et al. (1991: 344), an approach in which clients were given feedback that instilled confidence that they could succeed in certain tasks was examined. Clients developed a higher sense of efficacy as their experience of success increased and this increased the effectiveness of the therapeutic process. Such interventions create a positive effect that facilitates clients' achievement of therapeutic goals. Relatedness enables clients to establish a safe and supportive relationship with their therapists. In a study conducted by Baumeister and Leary (1995: 523), it was found that therapists who established a strong relationship of trust with clients increased their commitment to therapy and achieved more positive results in the therapy process. For example, a therapist strengthened the trust relationship by making the clients feel open and comfortable. This approach allowed the clients to better adapt to the therapy process and increase their chances of experiencing deeper change.

Strategies to increase intrinsic motivation enable clients to play a more active role in the therapy process. In a study conducted by Vansteenkiste and Sheldon (2006: 446), clients were supported to set goals in accordance with their interests and to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to achieve these goals. When the clients' intrinsic motivation was strengthened, they showed more participation and were more successful in achieving therapeutic goals. Such strategies enable clients to use their own resources effectively and experience more meaningful changes in the therapy process. As a case study example, the inclusion of an adolescent client in the therapy process in line with SDT principles can be discussed. In this case study, the autonomy-supportive relationship with the client, competence enhancement strategies and a secure therapeutic bond helped the client to make significant progress in the therapy process. The client had the opportunity to identify his/her own goals during the therapy process and developed personal strategies to achieve these goals. In addition, the positive feedback provided by the therapist and a safe relationship environment strengthened the client's intrinsic motivation (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006: 300). This case illustrates how SDT principles are effectively applied in psychological counseling processes and how clients experience positive changes in the therapy process.

### **5. Effectiveness of Self-Determination Theory in Psychological Counseling**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has been shown to provide various positive effects and healing outcomes when used in psychological counseling. The effectiveness of SDT in counseling is based on many studies conducted to determine how effective it is in meeting the motivational and psychological needs of clients.

### **5.1. Increased client engagement and commitment to therapy**

SDT is an effective approach to increase clients' participation in the therapy process. In the studies conducted by Ryan and Deci (2000: 76), it was found that autonomy-supportive strategies enable clients to participate in the therapy process at a higher level. When clients set their own goals and play an active role in the therapy process, they show a higher level of commitment and participate more deeply in the therapy (Ryan & Deci, 2008: 190). This increases the effectiveness of the therapy process and improves the results obtained by the clients.

The effect of SDT in increasing client engagement is supported by current studies. Autonomy-supportive therapeutic approaches encourage clients to participate more actively in the therapy process. Vansteenkiste et al.'s (2022: 15) study emphasises the success of SDT in increasing client engagement. The study revealed that clients showed more commitment in the therapy process and this commitment positively affected therapeutic outcomes. The effectiveness of increasing the commitment of clients in therapeutic processes is also supported by SDT. Studies by Deci and Ryan (2017: 37) have shown that autonomy-supportive approaches increase clients' commitment to therapy and this commitment has positive effects on long-term therapeutic outcomes. High commitment to the therapy process is generally associated with better treatment outcomes and client satisfaction.

### **5.2. Increased intrinsic motivation**

SDT's strategies to increase intrinsic motivation enable clients to be more effective in the therapy process. Intrinsic motivation involves individuals setting goals in accordance with their own values and interests and showing a high motivation to achieve these goals (Vansteenkiste et al., 2004: 242). Increasing intrinsic motivation enables clients to be more active and determined in the therapy process, which contributes to more permanent therapeutic changes.

The effect of SDT on increasing intrinsic motivation has been supported by many studies conducted in recent years. Intrinsic motivation encourages individuals to set goals based on their own values and interests. A meta-analysis by Ryan and Deci (2020) showed that autonomy-supportive strategies increase clients' intrinsic motivation, which leads to positive outcomes in the therapeutic process. Therapeutic approaches that increase feelings of autonomy and competence enable clients to participate in the therapy process with higher intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). A study by Gagné et al. (2022) emphasises the effectiveness of SDT in increasing intrinsic motivation and its positive effects on achieving clients' goals. Clients show a higher motivation in an environment that supports their autonomy, which makes therapeutic processes more effective.

### **5.3. Increased psychological well-being**

The application of the basic principles of SDT can be effective in increasing the psychological well-being of clients. Studies conducted by Ryan and Deci (2001: 72) show that meeting the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness provides a significant increase in the psychological well-being of clients. When these basic needs of the clients are met, their stress levels decrease, their life satisfaction increases and their general psychological well-being is strengthened. This increases the overall effectiveness of the therapy process and contributes to the long-term recovery of the clients. The effect of SDT on enhancing psychological well-being has also been widely researched. Studies by Deci and Ryan (2017: 319) revealed that

meeting the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness increased the general psychological well-being of clients. Meeting these needs reduces clients' stress levels and increases their life satisfaction.

A recent study further strengthened the capacity of SDT to support psychological well-being. Niemann et al. (2022: 132) found that the improvement provided by SDT in clients' psychological well-being is long-term and that this improvement improves the overall quality of life of clients. This study provides an important source supporting the effects of SDT on psychological well-being.

#### **5.4. Behavioural change and achieving goals**

SDT can also be effective in behavioural change processes of clients. A study conducted by Deci and Ryan (2000: 263) revealed that when clients increase their intrinsic motivation towards their own goals, they are more successful in achieving these goals. When autonomy-supportive approaches and competence enhancement strategies were used, clients achieved higher success rates in achieving their goals. This shows how effective SDT is in the process of achieving therapeutic goals. The research conducted by Vansteenkiste et al. (2022: 14) showed that SDT provides high success rates in behavioural change processes and supports clients to achieve the goals they set. Intrinsic motivation enables clients to achieve higher success rates in achieving their goals. In addition, the study by Hagger et al. (2022: 386) examined how SDT is effective in behavioural change processes and how it supports clients to achieve long-term goals. This study is a current source that highlights the effectiveness of SDT in behavioural change processes.

#### **5.5. Long-term effects and sustainable changes**

The long-term effects of SDT in therapeutic processes are also remarkable. Research by Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006: 295) shows that SDT increases intrinsic motivation and makes therapeutic changes more permanent and sustainable. Thanks to the intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being gained during the therapy process, clients are more successful in maintaining positive changes after therapy. This emphasises the long-term therapeutic effects of SDT. Morin et al. (2022: 425) examined the persistence of SDT in the long-term psychological well-being of clients. The study revealed that SDT is effective in long-term changes and sustainable improvements.

#### **5.6. Clinical research and meta-analyses**

Clinical research and meta-analyses evaluating the effectiveness of SDT in psychological counseling provide findings that support the overall success of the theory. Current clinical research examines the effects of SDT in therapeutic processes in different contexts. The study by Hagger et al. (2022: 329) demonstrated how SDT is effective in various clinical situations and its positive effects on clients' well-being. This study shows that SDT has a wide spectrum of effects in clinical practice. Meta-analyses evaluating the effectiveness of SDT in therapeutic processes provide important findings supporting the general validity and effectiveness of the theory. These meta-analyses show that SDT provides positive results in various therapeutic approaches and interventions and has a wide range of applications (Ng et al., 2012: 336). The meta-analysis conducted by Ryan and Deci (2020: 75) emphasises the positive effects of SDT in various therapeutic approaches and clinical applications. The meta-analysis showed that

SDT enables clients to better adapt to therapeutic processes by meeting their autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs.

## 6. Strengths and Weaknesses of Self-Determination Theory

Although Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has a wide range of applications in psychological counseling, it has some limitations as well as strengths. In this section, we will examine the strengths and weaknesses of SDT in detail.

### 6.1. Strengths

- *Strengthening intrinsic motivation:* One of the most powerful aspects of SDT is its capacity to increase clients' intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation encourages individuals to set goals in accordance with their values and interests and provides a high motivation to achieve these goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000: 75). Research shows that meeting the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness strengthens clients' intrinsic motivation and enables them to be more effective in the therapeutic process (Deci & Ryan, 2008: 183). SDT is an effective theory for increasing clients' intrinsic motivation. Recent studies support the positive effects of SDT on intrinsic motivation. For example, a meta-analysis conducted by Ryan and Deci (2020: 101860) revealed that autonomy-supportive strategies strengthen clients' intrinsic motivation and this leads to positive results in the therapeutic process. In an environment that supports their autonomy, clients set their own goals and show a higher motivation to achieve these goals.
- *Enhancement of psychological well-being:* SDT is an effective approach for enhancing clients' psychological well-being. Studies by Ryan and Deci (2000: 75) have demonstrated that meeting the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness strengthens clients' overall psychological well-being. When these basic needs are met, clients experience higher levels of life satisfaction and lower stress levels, enhancing the effectiveness of therapeutic processes. The capacity of SDT to improve clients' psychological well-being is supported by recent research. A study conducted by Deci and Ryan (2017) found that fulfilling the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness leads to a significant increase in clients' overall psychological well-being. Meeting these fundamental needs reduces clients' stress levels and enhances their life satisfaction.
- *Behavioral change and goal achievement:* SDT supports clients in achieving their goals and facilitates behavioral change processes. It has been found that when clients enhance their intrinsic motivation toward their own goals, they achieve higher success rates in reaching those goals (Vansteenkiste & Sheldon, 2006: 442). This demonstrates the effectiveness and success of SDT in behavioral change processes. SDT can be highly effective in helping clients set and achieve their goals. Research by Vansteenkiste et al. (2022: 14) showed that SDT leads to high success rates in behavioral change processes. Clients are more successful in reaching their goals when autonomy-supportive approaches are employed.
- *Long-term effects and sustainable changes:* SDT supports the long-term and sustainable maintenance of positive changes gained during therapy. Strategies that enhance intrinsic motivation enable clients to sustain positive changes even after the therapy ends (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006: 442). This underscores the long-term therapeutic effects and durability of SDT. Recent studies on the long-term effects of SDT highlight its



capacity to facilitate sustainable change. A meta-analysis conducted by Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2021:139) found that SDT enhances intrinsic motivation, supporting clients in maintaining long-term changes. This demonstrates SDT's potential to provide enduring and sustainable outcomes in therapeutic processes.

## **6.2. Weaknesses**

- *Implementation challenges:* The application of SDT's core principles in psychological counseling can sometimes present challenges. Specifically, supporting clients' need for autonomy and enhancing their sense of competence can be a complex process for therapists (Deci & Ryan, 2000: 259). Therapists may need to develop specialized training and strategies to effectively meet these needs. The difficulties in applying SDT's core principles are also addressed in current literature. For instance, a study by Reeve (2016: 299) highlighted that autonomy-supportive approaches can be complex in practice, and therapists need to develop specialized training and skills to implement these strategies effectively. Therapists may face challenges in meeting clients' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
- *Cultural differences:* SDT is often considered a Western-oriented approach, and it may face application challenges in different cultural contexts. Cultural differences can lead to variations in how clients express and fulfill their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Chirkov et al., 2003: 166). This makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of SDT across diverse cultural settings. The applicability of SDT in cultural contexts is a subject of current research. A study by Chirkov et al. (2023: 656) demonstrated the challenges of applying SDT in different cultural contexts and how cultural variations can alter its effects. Diverse cultural settings can influence how clients experience their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, questioning the universal validity of SDT.
- *Individual differences:* Although SDT primarily focuses on the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, individual differences may exist. Some clients may experience these basic needs differently, raising questions about whether SDT is equally effective for everyone (Ryan & Deci, 2002: 28). Acknowledging individual differences among clients can affect the applicability of SDT. Recent studies have addressed how variations in individuals' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness can influence the theory's implementation and effectiveness. Research by Ryan and Deci (2019: 112) discussed how individual differences can impact the application and outcomes of SDT. Taking into account individual differences among clients can enhance the effectiveness of SDT.
- *Research limitations:* Although many studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of SDT, some research may have methodological limitations. For instance, certain studies may have been conducted with small sample sizes, which can restrict the generalizability of the findings (Ng et al., 2012: 333). Additionally, some studies may lack a thorough evaluation of long-term effects. The limitations of research on SDT are also noted in the current literature. Meta-analyses and clinical studies often highlight issues such as methodological challenges and limited sample sizes. For example, a meta-analysis by Kaye et al. (2024: 101908) found that SDT is effective across various therapeutic approaches; however, the generalizability of some findings may be constrained due to methodological limitations in the included studies.

## **7. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is widely recognized as a significant theory in psychological counseling. The theory has broad application potential in enhancing clients' intrinsic motivation, improving their psychological well-being, and supporting behavioral changes. By focusing on fundamental needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, SDT enables clients to be more engaged and active in therapeutic processes (Ryan & Deci, 2020: 101860).

Recent research confirms the effectiveness of SDT in enhancing intrinsic motivation, improving psychological well-being, and supporting long-term changes. Autonomy-supportive approaches and competence-enhancing strategies contribute to clients' success during therapy and their ability to maintain positive changes post-therapy (Vansteenkiste et al., 2022: 14; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2021: 136). However, there are challenges and limitations in the application of SDT. Cultural differences, individual variations, and practical difficulties raise questions about whether SDT is equally effective across all contexts and for all individuals (Chirkov et al., 2023: 661; Ryan & Deci, 2019: 143). Moreover, research limitations and methodological challenges may restrict the overall assessment of SDT's effects and validity (Kaye et al., 2024: 101908).

### **7.1. Recommendations for Future Research**

- Self-Determination Theory (SDT), conceptualized by Deci and Ryan, has been extensively researched and applied in counseling across various cultural settings, highlighting its flexibility and relevance in diverse contexts. A notable study by Walck (2017) explored how culturally diverse clients in the U.S., particularly minority women, harnessed cultural strengths and resilience to pursue counseling. The study employed a Critical Race Theory perspective to assess the clients' motivation, revealing that despite societal barriers and discrimination, these individuals showed autonomy in their decision to engage in therapy, aligning with SDT's core principles (Ryan & Deci, 2008: 189). Cross-cultural research has also been pivotal in confirming SDT's applicability beyond Western contexts. For instance, Hagger et al. (2005: 383) examined SDT in Greece, Poland, and Singapore, while Chirkov et al. (2003: 164) extended the theory's application to Russia. These studies found that autonomy-supportive environments significantly enhanced intrinsic motivation and well-being, even in collectivist societies that traditionally value interdependence over autonomy (Self-Determination Theory). Furthermore, in Japan, SDT has been adapted to special education, where it successfully addressed students' psychological needs, thereby enhancing engagement and motivation (Ohtake & Wehmeyer, 2004: 173). These findings support the use of SDT in counseling processes across different cultural contexts, emphasizing the importance of culturally sensitive approaches that still address fundamental psychological needs. But still, there is a need for extensive cultural research to better understand how SDT is applied in different cultural contexts and how cultural differences impact the theory. Developing SDT application strategies specific to cultural contexts could enhance the universal applicability of the theory (Chirkov et al., 2023: 659). Studies examining the effects of cultural differences on the core principles of SDT can reveal how the theory can be adapted and validated across diverse cultural settings (Kim et al., 2021: 782).
- More research is needed to understand the effects of individual differences on the application processes of SDT in counseling. Investigating how individuals experience

their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and how these experiences influence therapeutic processes, can enhance personalized applications of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2019: 141). Understanding the impact of individual variations on the implementation and outcomes of SDT can contribute to the development of tailored therapeutic approaches (Morin et al., 2022: 427).

- More comprehensive long-term studies should be conducted to evaluate the lasting impacts of SDT. Examining how sustainable the changes achieved during therapeutic processes are over time can help assess the long-term success of SDT (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2021: 131; Niemann et al., 2022: 135).
- Specific training and strategies should be developed for therapists to address the challenges in implementing SDT. Practical guides and training programs can be created to enable therapists to effectively apply autonomy-supportive approaches (Reeve, 2016: 289; Hagger et al., 2022: 327).
- To enhance the methodological quality of research on SDT, larger sample sizes and more robust research methods should be employed. Strengthening the methodological approaches used in meta-analyses and clinical studies will allow for a more reliable evaluation of SDT's effects (Kaye et al., 2024: 101908; Sailer et al., 2023: 103350).

## **7.2. Practical Recommendations**

- Individual therapeutic approaches that cater to clients' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness should be developed. Therapists can offer a more effective therapeutic process by considering the personal needs and goals of their clients (Vansteenkiste & Sheldon, 2022: 15).
- Training and support programs for therapists should be established to facilitate the effective implementation of SDT. These programs can help therapists learn the core principles of SDT and its application strategies (Hagger et al., 2022: 329).
- Feedback from clients should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the therapeutic process and SDT applications. Considering clients' experiences and feedback can aid in the continuous improvement of the therapeutic process (Gagné et al., 2022: 253).

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