

A Study on Adults' Cooking Behavior, Self-Efficacy, and Life Satisfaction: Focusing on established adulthood Men

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Abstract: During established adulthood, individuals face multiple role pressures that may affect their well-being and life satisfaction. However, engaging in appropriate leisure activities can not only enhance psychological fulfillment but also contribute to overall life quality. Cooking is considered by many men as an enjoyable leisure activity that generates positive psychological benefits. This study focuses on men in established adulthood, examining the impact of cooking behavior on life satisfaction and exploring the mediating role of self-efficacy. Using purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods, this study surveyed 500 men, obtaining 442 valid responses, with a questionnaire completion rate of 88.4%. The results indicate that: (1) cooking behavior, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction are significantly correlated; (2) cooking behavior positively predicts both self-efficacy and life satisfaction; (3) self-efficacy plays a partial mediating role between cooking behavior and life satisfaction. This study fills a gap in the research on men in established adulthood and highlights the psychological and life benefits of cooking as a leisure activity. The findings further support the positive impact of leisure activities on men's life satisfaction and provide insights for policy development and practical applications.

Keywords: established adulthood, cooking behavior, self-efficacy, life satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

As societal dynamics evolve, many young individuals delay recognizing adulthood until age 30 (Nelson & Luster, 2015), with over 70% of Chinese respondents aged 18–30 sharing this view (Kuang et al., 2024). Mehta et al. (2020) define established adulthood (30–45 years) as a key life stage marked by heightened work and family responsibilities. Individuals at this stage prioritize career growth, relationships, and caregiving, often juggling multiple roles, leading to increased stress and declining well-being (Mehta et al., 2020). Research suggests life satisfaction follows a U-shaped trajectory, reaching its lowest point around ages 40–50 before increasing until age 70 (Jebb et al., 2018; Steptoe et al., 2015; Baird et al., 2010). Life satisfaction varies by age (Fujita & Diener, 2005), reflecting age-related differences in subjective well-being (Cheung & Lucas, 2015; Anusic & Schimmack, 2016; Wurm et al., 2008), underscoring the importance of enhancing life satisfaction in established adulthood.

Self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to complete tasks successfully (Bandura, 1977), plays a direct role in improving life satisfaction. Individuals with higher self-efficacy are better at managing role pressures and experience greater achievement and psychological stability (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1992). In established adulthood, self-efficacy is a key resource for stress reduction and life satisfaction. For example, positive cooking experiences can boost men's confidence and enhance life quality.

Life satisfaction is a crucial factor in well-being, particularly through leisure activities (Veenhoven, 2011; Joshanloo, 2023; Knecht & Freund, 2016; Schulz et al., 2018). Leisure engagement is positively linked to physical and psychological health (Ku et al., 2016; Nemček et al., 2020). Schulz et al. (2018) found that actual participation in leisure activities has a greater impact on well-being than mere interest. When leisure activities align with personal interests, they enhance satisfaction and overall life balance (Knecht & Freund, 2016).

In recent years, cooking has increasingly been recognized as an enjoyable leisure activity rather than a household chore (Güler & Haseki, 2021). For men, cooking is often viewed as a hobby and recreational pursuit (Szabo, 2014; Rhee, 2019; Roos, Prättälä, & Koski, 2001). Research highlights the benefits of cooking for well-being (Farmer & Cotter, 2021; Mosko & Delach, 2021; Mills et al., 2020). Additionally, studies on American adults show that frequent and prolonged home cooking is linked to reduced consumption of ultra-processed foods, underscoring the role of dietary choices in health (Wolfson et al., 2024; de Barcellos et al., 2024).

Despite these insights, research on the relationship between cooking, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction in established adulthood remains limited, particularly in Taiwan. Given the intensified work and family demands at this stage, well-being often declines, making it critical to understand the challenges and needs of this demographic. With leisure activities increasingly recognized for enhancing well-being, this study examines life satisfaction as a key well-being indicator in established adulthood, focusing on how leisure cooking contributes to its improvement.

Based on the above discussion, the objectives of this study are:

- (1) Examine the current status of cooking behavior, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction.
- (2) Explore the relationships among cooking behavior, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction.
- (3) Analyze the explanatory power of cooking behavior on self-efficacy and life satisfaction.
- (4) Investigate the mediating effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between cooking behavior and life satisfaction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Studies on Cooking Behavior

The meaning of cooking varies among individuals—it can be seen as a household chore, a leisure activity, or a means of expressing care (Daniels et al., 2012). When individuals perceive cooking as a leisure activity, the meaning they assign to it reflects their motivation, which is closely related to the context and personal aspirations (Daniels et al., 2012). Güler and Haseki (2021) suggest that the primary motivations for cooking often stem from seeking pleasure and relaxation. Sidenvall, Nydahl, and Fjellström (2000) argue that the deeper meaning of cooking lies in giving to others, as the process of preparing a meal can be viewed as preparing a gift, which consists of four main stages: choosing a menu, cooking with fresh ingredients, presenting the meal aesthetically, and sharing the meal through communal dining. These stages emphasize not only the functional aspects of cooking but also its social and emotional value. Farmer and Cotter (2021), Mosko and Delach (2021), and Mills et al. (2020) further support the connection between cooking as a leisure activity and personal well-being. Moreover, cooking not only promotes healthy eating habits but also enhances interpersonal relationships through shared meals, fostering social interaction and emotional bonds. The positive emotional benefits of cooking, such as a sense of accomplishment, self-efficacy, and overall well-being, highlight its significance as a leisure activity.

Additionally, past research on cooking behavior has highlighted gender differences. Adler (1981) was one of the first scholars to propose the binary theory of cooking between men and women, suggesting fathers' cooking is experimental in both social and culinary aspects, whereas mothers' cooking is routine and ordinary. men's cooking as play, while women's cooking as work. Women's cooking has long been seen as an obligation oriented toward others, intended to please family members and ensure their well-being (Beagan et al., 2008). In contrast, men's cooking is often regarded as a self-centered leisure activity, a form of culinary artistry, performance, or personal indulgence (Szabo, 2013; Szabo, 2014; Rhee, 2019). Men typically cook on special occasions, weekends, or during barbecues

(Roos, Prättälä, & Koski, 2001). Hollows (2003) argued that men's engagement in daily cooking has been reframed as an entertainment activity within modern lifestyles, constructing a form of "culinary masculinity". Rhee (2019) further defined culinary masculinity as a new model of masculinity that is often portrayed in media, where male chefs and food enthusiasts emphasize family life through cooking and food consumption. These findings align with Kim, Park, and Park's (2024) study, which revealed gender differences in leisure preferences: for men, social activities are key factors in fulfilling social, psychological, and physiological needs, whereas for women, cultural activities and hobbies play a more significant role.

Based on these insights, this study focuses on men who perceive cooking as a leisure activity, examining their motivations related to pleasure, relaxation, and self-expression. It aims to explore whether leisure-oriented cooking behavior can serve as a pathway to enhancing life satisfaction.

2.2. Cooking Behavior, Self-Efficacy, and Life Satisfaction

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to complete a specific task (Jeon, 2016). The relationship among leisure activities, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction is well established (Baik, Nam, & Ryu, 2012; Deng et al., 2023; Parsakia, Knechtle, & Irandoust, 2024), as participation in leisure activities has been shown to enhance and predict life satisfaction (Martínez-Martí & Ruch, 2017; Deng et al., 2023; Đuranović, 2024). Serious leisure activities, which require significant time and effort investment, also contribute to enhanced subjective well-being (Newman, Tay, & Diener, 2014). Deng et al. (2023) conducted a study on university students, revealing that active engagement in leisure activities not only enhances students' life satisfaction but also indirectly influences it by increasing their self-efficacy, ultimately leading to overall improvements in life satisfaction. Additionally, participating in leisure activities can help reduce anxiety levels and promote psychological well-being (Deng et al., 2024). Furthermore, individuals with higher self-efficacy tend to experience greater happiness and express higher life satisfaction (Baik, Nam, & Ryu, 2012).

These findings indicate that leisure activities play a crucial role in enhancing life satisfaction (Tian et al., 2022). When cooking is perceived as a leisure activity, it also contributes to higher life satisfaction and well-being (Mosko & Delach, 2021; Mills et al., 2020). Moreover, individuals with higher self-efficacy perceptions tend to experience greater improvements in life satisfaction (Deng et al., 2024). Previous research has also emphasized the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between leisure activities and life satisfaction (Deng et al., 2023).

Overall, the benefits derived from participating in leisure activities not only directly enhance life satisfaction but may also exert an indirect influence through increased self-efficacy. When cooking is treated as a leisure activity, it follows a similar influence mechanism. Through engagement in cooking, individuals experience a sense of accomplishment and control, which further enhances their self-efficacy and enables them to derive greater satisfaction and happiness from the activity. Particularly, when individuals demonstrate higher involvement and creativity in the cooking process, this active engagement reinforces their well-being and life satisfaction.

Based on the existing research findings, active participation in leisure activities has a profound impact on improving life satisfaction, and self-efficacy serves as a key psychological factor in this process.

Based on these findings, this study develops the following hypotheses:

H1: Cooking behavior, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction are significantly correlated.

H2: Cooking behavior has a significant explanatory effect on self-efficacy and life satisfaction.

H3: Self-efficacy mediates the relationship between cooking behavior and life satisfaction.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Research Framework

This study draws upon the research frameworks proposed by Deng et al. (2023), Kim, Byon, & Kim (2021), and Đuranović (2024) to explore the relationship between cooking behavior, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction. Given that this study aims to enhance the life satisfaction of men in established adulthood, it examines whether cooking behavior can serve as a leisure activity that contributes to life

satisfaction. To validate this framework, this study employs a survey methodology, with questionnaire items covering demographic variables, cooking behavior, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction (As shown in Figure 1).



Figure1. *Research Framework*

3.2. Research Participants and Sampling

This study adopted purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods. The research team collaborated with non-formal culinary courses to conduct a survey among male participants. Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants were screened to ensure that they perceived the cooking process as a routine leisure activity, rather than a household chore or a means to fulfill physiological needs. The study specifically targeted men aged 30 to 45, aligning with the research focus on individuals in established adulthood. Additionally, the snowball sampling method was used to further distribute the questionnaire. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed, and after excluding incomplete responses, 442 valid samples were collected, resulting in a completion rate of 88.4%. To acknowledge participants' time and effort, all respondents who completed the survey received a gift card as compensation.

3.3. Research Scales and Data Analysis

This study utilized four research scales: Personal Background Information Questionnaire, Cooking Behavior Scale, Self-Efficacy Scale, and Life Satisfaction Scale, all measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 7 = "Strongly Agree"). The validity of the scales was confirmed through expert assessment by five scholars.

3.3.1. Personal Background Information Questionnaire

Collected demographic data, including age and education level.

3.3.2. Cooking Behavior Scale

Adapted from Namin et al. (2020), consisting of 8 items. Higher scores indicate greater proficiency in cooking behavior. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.937$.

3.3.3. Self-Efficacy Scale

Based on the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer et al., 1999; Kot et al., 2022), comprising 13 items. Higher scores indicate greater self-efficacy. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.961$.

3.3.4. Life Satisfaction Scale

Developed from Lubin & Van Whitlock (2004) and Margolis et al. (2019), consisting of 5 items. Higher scores reflect greater life satisfaction. Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.910$.

3.3.5. Data Processing and Analysis

Data were coded and analyzed using SPSS 25.0, applying descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Analysis of Demographic Variables and Questionnaire Responses

As shown in Table 1, the majority of male participants in this study were aged 30 to 35 years, accounting

for 198 individuals (44.8%). In terms of educational background, the largest group consisted of university graduates, with 223 participants (50.5%).

Table1. Demographic Analysis (n=442)

Background Variables	Category	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Age	30~35 years	198	44.8
	36~40 years	97	21.9
	41~45 years	147	33.3
Educational Level	Junior High School	9	2.0
	Senior High School/ Vocational School	43	9.7
	Five-Year Junior College	37	8.4
	University	223	50.5
	Graduate School (Master's and above)	130	29.4

Table 2 summarizes the results for each construct. Cooking Behavior (M = 4.66) and Life Satisfaction (M = 4.93) fall between "Neutral" and "Somewhat Agree," indicating a generally positive perception. Self-Efficacy (M = 5.44) falls between "Somewhat Agree" and "Agree," reflecting a stronger positive perception.

Table2. Analysis of Cooking Behavior, Self-Efficacy, and Life Satisfaction

Construct	Number of Items	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Cooking Behavior	8	4.66	1.30
Self-Efficacy	13	5.44	1.06
Life Satisfaction	5	4.93	1.18

4.2. Pearson Correlation Analysis of Participants' Constructs

This section examines the correlation among cooking behavior, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction using Pearson product-moment correlation analysis. As shown in Table 3:

- (1) Cooking behavior and self-efficacy exhibit a significant positive correlation.
- (2) Cooking behavior and life satisfaction are significantly associated.
- (3) Self-efficacy and life satisfaction show a significant positive relationship.

These results confirm the correlations among the three variables, supporting Hypothesis 1.

Table3. Correlation Analysis of Cooking Behavior, Self-Efficacy, and Life Satisfaction

Construct		Cooking Behavior	Self-Efficacy	Life Satisfaction
Cooking Behavior	.937	1		
Self-Efficacy	.961	.394**	1	
Life Satisfaction	.910	.346**	.556**	1

Note: **p<.01

4.3. Explanation of Cooking Behavior, Self-Efficacy, and Life Satisfaction

The multiple regression analysis confirms that cooking behavior and self-efficacy effectively predict life satisfaction. In this study, cooking behavior was the independent variable, self-efficacy the mediating variable, and life satisfaction the dependent variable. To address common method variance (CMV), Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) was conducted. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) showed a cumulative explained variance of 71.0%, with the first factor accounting for 46.7%, below the 50% threshold, indicating that CMV effects are negligible.

As shown in Table 4, t-values indicate that the regression coefficients of cooking behavior ($\beta = .346$) and self-efficacy ($\beta = .556$) are statistically significant, suggesting that higher levels of cooking behavior and self-efficacy lead to greater life satisfaction, supporting Hypothesis 2. Regarding the mediating role of self-efficacy, results confirm partial mediation ($\beta = .346$), indicating that cooking behavior directly

influences life satisfaction, while self-efficacy further enhances this effect, leading to higher life satisfaction. Thus, Hypothesis 3 is partially supported.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis of the Mediating Effect of Self-Efficacy on Cooking Behavior and Life Satisfaction

	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		standardized Coefficients	t
			β	Standard Error	β	
Step 1	Cooking Behavior	Self-Efficacy	.322	.036	.394	8.993***
Step 2	Cooking Behavior	Life Satisfaction	.315	.041	.346	7.746***
Step 3	Self-Efficacy	Life Satisfaction	.619	.044	.556	14.039***
Step 4	Cooking Behavior	Life Satisfaction	.137	.039	.151	3.541***
	Self-Efficacy		.553	.047	.497	11.676***

Note: *** $p < .001$

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that cooking can serve as a meaningful leisure activity (Güler & Haseki, 2021), rather than merely a household chore. Leisure activities play a crucial role in psychosocial well-being, providing individuals with opportunities for self-expression, relaxation, and cognitive engagement (Knecht & Freund, 2016; Schulz et al., 2018). Cooking, in particular, embodies these characteristics, allowing individuals to engage in creative expression, skill development, and sensory fulfillment, highlighting its potential as a leisure pursuit with psychological and physiological benefits.

Engaging in leisure-oriented cooking has been shown to provide positive psychological and physiological effects (Farmer & Cotter, 2021; Mosko & Delach, 2021; Mills et al., 2020). Psychologically, cooking fosters a sense of mastery, accomplishment, and autonomy, which contribute to enhanced self-efficacy and emotional well-being. Additionally, when cooking occurs in a social context, it further strengthens interpersonal relationships and relational satisfaction (Sidenvall, Nydahl, & Fjellström, 2000). Physiologically, home cooking is closely linked to healthier dietary habits, as individuals who cook tend to adopt nutritionally balanced eating patterns (de Barcellos et al., 2024; Wolfson et al., 2024). These combined effects suggest that when cooking is perceived as a leisure activity, it contributes to overall life well-being. This study further validates the relationship between self-efficacy and life satisfaction. Self-efficacy serves as a partial mediator in the relationship between cooking behavior and life satisfaction (Deng et al., 2023; Deng et al., 2024), suggesting that individuals who perceive themselves as more competent in cooking are more likely to experience greater psychological benefits and higher life satisfaction. These findings align with previous research on the role of self-efficacy in shaping subjective well-being, further emphasizing its importance as a psychological mechanism linking leisure activities and well-being.

For men in established adulthood (ages 30–45), leisure activities become particularly important as this life stage is often accompanied by increasing work and family responsibilities (Mehta et al., 2020; Jebb et al., 2018; Steptoe et al., 2015). The findings of this study suggest that cooking can serve as an accessible and beneficial leisure activity, providing opportunities for stress relief, self-expression, and personal fulfillment. By fostering self-efficacy and life satisfaction, cooking represents a practical and rewarding leisure option, particularly suited to the needs of this demographic (Kim, Park, & Park, 2024).

Finally, this study addresses a research gap concerning leisure and well-being among men in established adulthood. While previous studies have explored the benefits of cooking, most have focused on women, professional chefs, or younger populations. By investigating the psychological and well-being effects of cooking for men in this age group, this study provides valuable academic insights and offers recommendations for future research, public health programs, and leisure-based well-being enhancement strategies.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study confirm a significant relationship among cooking behavior, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction. Cooking behavior positively influences both self-efficacy and life satisfaction, with self-efficacy partially mediating this relationship. These results suggest that cooking as a leisure activity enhances self-perception and overall well-being, reinforcing its role in improving quality of life. This study contributes to leisure activity and well-being research, demonstrating that cooking is not merely a household task but a meaningful activity that fosters personal growth and satisfaction. Individuals who actively engage in leisure cooking develop higher self-efficacy, which, in turn, enhances life satisfaction. This underscores the psychological and emotional benefits of cooking, extending beyond its functional role. For men in established adulthood (ages 30–45), the increasing demands of work and family responsibilities often limit leisure opportunities, impacting well-being and life satisfaction. The findings suggest that cooking serves as an accessible and effective leisure activity, providing stress relief, personal fulfillment, and improved life satisfaction. These results highlight the importance of integrating leisure cooking into lifestyle recommendations, well-being programs, and stress management strategies. Promoting active engagement in meaningful leisure activities can help sustain long-term well-being. In conclusion, this study highlights cooking as a valuable leisure activity that enhances self-efficacy and life satisfaction, reinforcing the broader significance of leisure participation in fostering well-being. Even everyday activities such as cooking can serve as powerful tools for enhancing life quality.

7. RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

This study makes several key contributions. First, it explores the relationship between cooking, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction, providing valuable insights into how leisure cooking influences well-being. Second, it adopts a leisure cooking perspective in its research design, addressing a gap in existing literature. Third, by focusing on men in established adulthood, this study advances research on an often-overlooked demographic group. For future research, expanding the scope to include other demographic groups, such as older men's perspectives on leisure cooking, would provide a broader understanding of this phenomenon. Additionally, conducting longitudinal studies could offer deeper insights into how leisure cooking and life satisfaction evolve over time. Furthermore, employing qualitative research methods would allow for a more nuanced exploration of the psychological and social dimensions of cooking and its impact on well-being. Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations. First, as a cross-sectional study focusing exclusively on Taiwanese men aged 30–45 years, its findings cannot be readily generalized to other populations. Second, as the study specifically examines leisure cooking, individual perceptions of cooking as a leisure activity may vary, limiting the applicability of the findings to cooking performed as a household chore.

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