

## ANALYSIS OF LEISURE TIME AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN A GROUP OF TEENAGERS IN MOLDOVA

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### Abstract

**Objectives.** The aim of the study is to find out how students spend their free time and to assess the daily time allocated to these activities; also to determine the presence (or absence) of the group of friends and the parents' level of interest concerning the child's school performance and free time activities.

**Material and methods.** The survey was carried out on a group of 212 pupils, in the 7th and 8th grade, from two different schools, who completed a questionnaire with items about leisure time and social relationships.

**Results.** Television programs are not viewed by 25.00% young people, the differences calculated by grade and school being statistically insignificant ( $p>0.05$ ). The time spent on the computer is "zero" in 31.13% cases; the differences are statistically insignificant. The presence of the group of friends is recognized by 56.60% young people, but there are also 10.84% of cases in which the option "none" is chosen; the calculated differences are statistically significant ( $p<0.05$ ) for both grades and schools. There are 26.88% situations where students do not spend time with friends outside the school. Parents "always" have time when it comes to school performance only in 26.88% of cases and concerning the pupil's leisure activities in 23.58% of cases. Differences calculated by grade and school are statistically insignificant ( $p>0.05$ ).

**Conclusions.** There are many problems with how teenagers spend leisure time and with the parent's level of interest about school performance.

**Keywords:** computer games, leisure activities, parents, teenagers.

### Introduction

Adolescence is a period between 11 and 18 years of age, and it represents the transition from childhood to adult life. During this period the young person undergoes numerous physical, mental and social changes. It is important to monitor adolescent health in order to avoid the occurrence of sexual problems, nutritional imbalances, psychological problems, cognitive problems (depression, anxiety, social isolation and suicidal tendency) and accidents (Salam et al., 2016).

Particular attention should be paid to the social situations represented by the changing relationship with parents and the appearance of the group of friends. Parents become the preferred confidants when it comes to matters relating to health and school, but not those related to feelings and sex (Ballonoff Suleiman and Dahl, 2017). Parents remain the main pillar when it comes to

school related issues, which requires close collaboration with teachers. Nowadays it is considered that the school should be closer to the community, and the relationship with the parents should be constant (Palmieri and Palma, 2017).

The group of friends becomes more and more important. Students perform numerous group activities, they dress the same, have the same musical and literary tastes, have the same leisure activities and even the same eating habits (Gavăt, Albu and Petrariu, 2006). Particular attention should be paid to leisure activities, as young people turn to computer use and socialize on the internet. This type of socialization is often associated with the appearance of loneliness, depression, anxiety and aggressive behavior (Buonomo et al., 2015). Currently, even computer addiction is being described as an emergent issue, which could be as serious as drug addiction. It is also associated with the lack of real friends and the time spent with them. The peer group and curiosity may have a major role in the start of drug use, too (Baciu, 2017). Another issue that may arise is that of nutritional imbalances and the avoidance of specialist advice concerning this problem. It is preferable to young people to obtain information from the online space, a phenomenon that may favor the appearance of body image issues and the use of totally inappropriate diets (Arseniev-Koehler et al., 2016).

The second preferred way of spending leisure time is represented by television programs. Adults spend most of their free time in front of the television, listening to music or meeting with their neighbors (Rada, 2017). With age, there is a 15% increase in the percentage of those who spend time with friends, neighbors and almost 20% of those who spend time in front of the television. In this context, young people will get the same habits as their parents or grandparents and risk becoming sedentary.

*Objectives of the study:* knowing the time spent by young people in front of the television / computer screen and assessing the differences that occur between schools and grade; the presence of the group of friends and the time spent with them; parental interest in the child's school performance and leisure activities.

## Material and methods

The study was carried out on a group of 212 pupils in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, aged between 13 and 15 years. The group is comprised of 111 pupils from a National College in Pascani, Iasi County and 101 children from a General School in Dorohoi, Botosani County. These are pupils from two small towns, belonging to two counties in Moldova, Romania. These teenagers were given a questionnaire on leisure time and social relationships.

Leisure time involved evaluating the time spent in front of the television (TV) and computer: "How many hours per day do you spend watching television programs? - using the computer?":

1. Zero 2. 30-60 min. 3. 2-3h 4. 4-5h.

The assessment of social relationships has been quantified using two basic elements represented by the group of friends and parents' interest level.

Friends group: How many true friends do you have?:

1. Zero 2. One 3. Two 4. Three or more.

In general, how many times per week do you go out with friends after school?:

1. Zero 2. 1 time 3. 2-3 times 4. 4-5 times 5. 6-7 times.

Do parents (at least one of them) help you with how you prepare your homework? - organize your free time?

1. Always 2. Most of the time 3. Seldom 4. Never.

Interpretation of the results were done separately for the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades and for the two schools (Pașcani and Dorohoi). The results were processed using the Pearson's chi-squared test.

## Results

The results are presented considering the two basic aspects of the study: leisure and social relationships.

At present, basic leisure activities include watching television programs and playing computer games.

In most cases, students watch television programs 30-60 minutes (37.73%) or 2-3 hours (30.66%) per day. There are 25.00% of young people who marked the "Zero" option (Table 1).

Differences calculated by school year are statically insignificant ( $p>0.05$ ,  $f=3$ ,  $\chi^2=3.208$ ) and draw attention to the 8th graders who have to undertake the so called maturity exam. The differences calculated by school are also statistically insignificant ( $p>0.05$ ,  $f=3$ ,  $\chi^2=2.747$ ) and show a tendency of young people from different counties for spending their free time in front of the TV or computer screen.

**Table 1. Daily time spent watching television programs**

Time	Grade		School		Total %
	7 <sup>th</sup> grade	8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Paşcani	Dorohoi	
Zero	22	31	23	30	53 – 25.00
30-60 min.	43	37	43	37	80 – 37.73
2-3 hours	37	28	38	27	65 - 30.66
4-5 hours	8	6	7	7	14 – 6.60

Another free-time activity preferred by young people is that of playing computer games. The situation is interesting because the dominant answer (31.13%) is "Zero" (Table 2).

**Table 2. Daily time spent on the computer**

Time	Grade		School		Total %
	7 <sup>th</sup> grade	8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Paşcani	Dorohoi	
Zero	30	36	31	35	66 – 31.13
30-60 min.	39	26	34	31	65 – 30.66
2-3 hours	32	24	32	24	56 – 26.41
4-5 hours	9	16	14	11	25 – 11.79

Differences calculated by grades are statistically insignificant ( $p>0.05$ ,  $f=3$ ,  $\chi^2=5.912$ ), as well as those calculated by school ( $p>0.05$ ,  $f=3$ ,  $\chi^2=1.436$ ).

The second aspect to be observed is that of the presence of the group of friends and the relationship between the child and the parents. In the studied group the answer "three or more" (friends) is seen in 56.60% of cases. Our attention is drawn to the 10.84% of pupils who marked the "Zero" option (Table 3).

**Table 3. The presence of the group of friends**

Friends	Zero	One	Two	Three or more
Results based on grade				
7 <sup>th</sup> grade	8	8	21	73
8 <sup>th</sup> grade	15	19	21	47
Total	23	27	42	120
%	10.84	12.73	19.81	56.60
Results based on school				
Paşcani	14	11	29	57
Dorohoi	9	16	13	63

The calculated differences based on school year are statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $f = 3$ ,  $\chi^2 = 12,505$ ) and underlines the situation of the 8th grade students where the group of friends becomes less important.

Concerning schools, the differences are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $f = 3$ ,  $\chi^2 = 7.962$ ) and draw attention to the students in Pașcani where the group of friends is present, but there are more young people who chose the "two friends" or the "Zero" option. The presence of friends involves time spent with them outside of school. Unfortunately, 26.88% of negative responses appear (Table 4).

**Table 4. Time spent socializing with friends outside of school**

Times per week	Zero	1 time	2-3 times	4-5 times	6-7 times
Results based on grade					
7 <sup>th</sup> grade	24	30	35	5	16
8 <sup>th</sup> grade	33	23	33	8	5
Total	57	53	68	13	21
%	26.88	25.00	32.07	6.13	9.90
Results based on school					
Pașcani	24	20	43	10	14
Dorohoi	33	33	25	3	7

The calculated differences based on grade are statistically insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ,  $f = 4$ ,  $\chi^2 = 8.528$ ). When looking at schools, the calculated differences are statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ,  $f = 4$ ,  $\chi^2 = 15.060$ ) and highlight the increased frequency of negative responses from teenagers in Dorohoi.

Only 26.88% of teenagers chose the "always" answer related to parents' interest level. There are 36.32% of "most of the time" responses. Practically in over 60% of cases, the parents check their child's work. Our attention is drawn to the over one-third of the young people who chose the "rarely" or "never" answers (Table 5).

**Table 5. Parents' level of interest concerning school performance**

Interest level	Grade		School		Total %
	7 <sup>th</sup> grade	8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Pașcani	Dorohoi	
Always	37	20	32	25	57 – 26.88
Most of the time	39	38	43	34	77 – 36.32
Rarely	26	34	28	32	60 – 28.30
Never	8	10	8	10	18 – 8.49

Differences calculated based on grade are statistically insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ,  $f = 3$ ,  $\chi^2 = 6.200$ ), a worrying result for the students in the 8th grade. The differences when looking at schools are also insignificant statistically ( $p > 0.05$ ,  $f = 3$ ,  $\chi^2 = 1.927$ ).

The leisure activities of the young people are rarely monitored in some families. There are 29.24% of "rarely" answers and 8.96% of "never" answers. Practically, one third of surveyed students are not being supervised in their spare time (Table 6).

**Table 6. Parental preoccupation for leisure activities**

Interest level	Always	Most of the time	Rarely	Never
	Results based on grade			
7 <sup>th</sup> grade	31	41	29	9
8 <sup>th</sup> grade	19	40	33	10

Interest level	Always	Most of the time	Rarely	Never
	Results based on grade			
Total	50	81	62	19
%	23.58	38.20	29.24	8.96
Results based on school				
Pașcani	30	42	31	8
Dorohoi	20	39	31	11

Differences calculated by grade are statistically insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ,  $f = 3$ ,  $\chi^2 = 2.972$ ), as well as those based on the school ( $p > 0.05$ ,  $f = 3$ ,  $\chi^2 = 2.069$ ).

## Discussions

There were addressed two essential aspects, that of leisure time and social relationships. Spare time is mostly spent watching television programs and on the computer. In the study, there are 25.00% of the negative answers related to the time spent in front of the TV screen. In a study carried out on teenagers in Iasi we observed the presence of 22.78% of such answers (Albu et al., 2016). There are 22.61% negative answers from the students in the technical colleges in the Moldavian area, which shows a declining interest for viewing TV programs (Albu, Dima and Bădăluță, 2018).

Instead, the computer becomes more and more important to teenagers. There are 31.13% negative responses in the studied group, while in the Iași adolescents study, their frequency drops to 11.81%. It is an unusual answer considering that generally, students tend to spend a lot of time on the computer.

At the technical colleges in Bacau and Suceava, the percentage of negative responses increases to 32.16% and show the existence of different situations, probably related to the type of high school.

In a study carried out on adolescents in Zagreb, there were 72.66% cases of daily computer use, social networking (29.09%), computer games (25.14%), Internet browsing (20.76%), studying (14.32%) (Lazic, Pavlina and Belovic, 2017). Adolescent studies in the Republic of Moldova highlight the presence of 27% of students who use the computer daily, especially for Internet browsing and games (Croitoru, 2015).

In this study, there are 11.79% of students using the computer daily for 4-5 hours, while in the Zagreb group this percentage is 14% and in the Republic of Moldova 14.6%. It is a strange result which should be carefully studied to better understand the interests and concerns of the young people in the studied group. Usually, the time spent in front of the computer is associated with the emergence of online relationships and the tendency to reduce real life relationships with friends. In this context, it is important to evaluate social relationships and especially the existence of the group of friends.

At the ages of 13-15 years, the group of friends is very important, everything is done in groups, and the exclusion from such a group may have the consequences of a real tragedy.

The presence of the group of friends in adolescent life is an essential element for normal social development. We must not overlook the 10.84% of negative responses. A 4.52% negative response rate appears in another high school adolescent study (10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade) (Albu et al., 2018). In the current study, the percentage of adolescents with no friends is higher, which is concerning. There are also 26.88% of young people who do not spend time with their friends outside the school. These are situations that need to be known in order to properly intervene when social isolation occurs. In the high school adolescents study, in grades 10 and 11, the percentage was 22.62%, thus being similar. In Japanese adolescents, at the age of 13, 22.8% of boys and 25.8% of girls show a preference for solitude and there are 20.4% of boys and 11.8% of girls in a situation

of social isolation (Endo et al., 2017).

Parents must still help their children to prepare homework assignments and help organize their free time. Unfortunately, many problems arise because they are often very busy and get home tired from work. Parents are rarely interested in students' school performance in 28.30% of cases or "never" in 8.49% of cases. The modest level of interest that parents show is often associated with the idea that it is only the school's and teacher's obligation and responsibility to solve problems related to teaching children.

When looking at leisure time, 29.24% of "rarely" answers appear and 18.96% of "never" answers. Spare time cannot be the concern of the teaching staff, being entirely the responsibility of the parents. In high school adolescents, the situation is worse because 41.17% of "rarely" responses appear and 26.69% of "never" responses. Also, concerning spare time activities there are 38.00% of "rarely" answers and 20.36% "never" answers. Lack of family supervision (often) is associated with behavioral problems such as smoking (4.8%), alcohol use (16.00%), antisocial behavior (28.2%), and behavioral difficulties (19.6%) (Zilanawala, Sacker and Kelly, 2017). Harmonious family relationships, parents' involvement in education by enforcing rules and supervising leisure were factors that determined the participants to not use illegal drugs (Baciu, 2019).

Regarding the limitations of this study, it can be noticed that the sample includes pupils from two small towns in the counties of Moldova. It would be necessary to extend the study to other parts of the country, which would allow for a better overall picture. Unfortunately, such studies in our country are few and the discussions and interpretation of the results were done with the help of research carried out in the area of Moldova.

## Conclusions

In the questioned teenagers, time spent in front of the TV screen is modest, as is the interest for computer games. Few young people sit in front of the TV or computer for a period of 4-5 hours per day. The presence of the group of friends is recognized by most adolescents, but the time spent outside the school with them is nonexistent in over 25% of cases. There is a tendency for social isolation, which is worrying. The most difficult problem is related to the modest preoccupation of parents for school performance and leisure activities. These are pupils in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades who still need to be supervised and guided, but parents have no time for this aspect of the child's life. In this context, unwanted behaviors associated with the risk of loss of interest in school activities may occur.

Such studies are important because they enable teachers, school psychologists, physicians and even parents to focus on problematic aspects of the child's behavior.

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