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## The Current Problem of School Children – Lack of Physical Activity

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### Abstract

In the article, the authors present the survey results of younger school-age pupils' knowledge of the relation between physical activity and health. The survey was conducted within VEGA Grant Project No. 1/0606/15. The questionnaire investigation on a sample of 540 pupils found that respondents are familiar with and aware of the importance of physical activity for health, however, they are losing interest in sports and recreational activity. The main content of their free-time is playing with friends, playing computer games, and watching television.

**Keywords:** physical activity, health, pupil of primary education.

### Introduction

One of the main determinants of a healthy lifestyle for school-age children is sufficient physical activity. The optimal amount of physical activity is a prerequisite not only for children's physical and mental health, but also the prevention of serious civilization diseases, which include, for example high blood pressure, diabetes, gout (uric acid metabolic disorder), lipid metabolism disorders, musculoskeletal disorders and others.

Health, which is understood as the functional optimum of all vital signs of humans, as a state with no significant subjective and objective problems, as a complex display, allows us to respond positively to the changes and challenges of life. "Health is undoubtedly an essential resource and prerequisite for the balanced operation of all aspects of personality along the intention of its perception as a bio-psychological and socio-cultural structure" (Liba, 2008, pp.53).

Based on the different characteristics of health (WHO, 1999; Mužíková, Mužík, Kachlík, 2006; Liba, 2000; Wiegerová, 2000; Bendíková, 2014; and others) it is clear that people are responsible for their own health, for creating their own healthy lifestyle and for living healthy. By healthy lifestyle we understand the way one lives. Among the fundamental determinants of a healthy lifestyle, we most often include non-smoking, a healthy diet, adequate physical activity, limited alcohol consumption, enough sleep, optimism and a good mood, a joy of life, avoiding

harmful substances as well as generally hazardous and risk factors. A healthy individual, i.e. a person with a healthy lifestyle, has an adequate weight, normal blood pressure, low blood cholesterol level, physical fitness and performance, a healthy appearance, mental well-being, high disease resistance, and a low occurrence of diseases.

An adult's healthy lifestyle begins to form as early as childhood. The family environment and school play an important role in its formation. Health education at school is part of a comprehensive educational impact. The balanced formation of the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of personality through active care of our own health should be its result (Liba, 2008).

Health education is one of the main objectives of the "Physical and Sports Education" school subject in primary education. Apart from the positive influence of indicators for physical and motor development through motor tools, the content of this school subject gives pupils theoretical knowledge, through which teachers try to form their positive attitude towards physical education and sports from a very young age. Pupils are supposed to receive knowledge about the influence of physical activity on their health and to it as a health strengthening means.

Based on the innovative national educational system (ISCED 1, 2015) the goal of a teacher when planning educational activities in school should be the creation of a stimulating environment for pupils, which enables them to acquire new motor skills, and these will be a prerequisite for the implementation of physical activity outside the school environment. For the effective acquisition of these skills, there is the real possibility of creating a permanent relationship to physical activity, which is the key to a healthy lifestyle.

### Aim

The aim of this survey, which we carried out in the primary schools of the Central Slovakia Region, was to find the level of pupils' knowledge about the importance of physical activity for health and to assess the place of sports activities in the structure of the activities of younger school-age pupils in their free time.

In the survey we assume that:

H1 – Pupils surveyed have, under the state educational program, elementary knowledge about the importance of sports and physical educational activities for health.

H2 – The pupils surveyed spend their free time with sports and recreational activities.

### Materials and Methods

The surveyed cohort consists of fourth-year pupils of primary schools from the Central Slovakia Region. From the 540 pupils surveyed 255 were boys and 285 were girls. Additional information on the surveyed cohort is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of surveyed cohort by residence and age

| Residence   |     |       | Age          |     |       |
|-------------|-----|-------|--------------|-----|-------|
|             |     | %     |              |     | %     |
| town        | 159 | 29.44 | 10-year olds | 330 | 61.11 |
| countryside | 381 | 70.56 | 11-year olds | 210 | 38.89 |
| total       | 540 | 100   | total        | 540 | 100   |

For the surveyed cohort, we have set up an anonymous questionnaire containing open, closed, and semi-closed questions. Questions were divided into three groups: I – personal information, II – knowledge of the impact of sports on the human body, III – relationship of pupils towards sports. The questionnaire included 21 items in total.

Data obtained from the questionnaire were processed on the basis of a non-parametric statistical analyses, such as frequency and pivot tables, nonparametric correlation test (Spearman's Test), a nonparametric one-way analysis of variance (Kruskal - Walis method). Alongside we conducted a t-test of cross-correlations.

## Results

Based on the analysis of our survey results, we can state that the respondents are aware of the importance of physical activity for health, and as they state, the impact of physical activity is manifested mainly in improving their fitness, muscle strengthening and body shaping. However, they undervalue (they are unaware of) the emotional aspect of a sport activity, the majority (58.43 %) of pupils thinking that sports activities can be fully replaced by physical labour. There are significant differences between the answers of boys and girls to this question - boys can imagine replacing sports with physical labour. When we evaluated answers to the given question according to residence, we also found significant differences - respondents from rural areas think that physical labour can replace sports activities. The difference between professional and recreational sports is realized by 70% of the pupils surveyed (25.56 % cannot recognize this difference). When asked what type of sport they would prefer, 41.67 % of respondents answered recreational sport, 40% answered professional sport. Only 16.11% of respondents were unable to decide between recreational and professional sports and 4 respondents (2.22 %) stated that they want to do neither of them. The difference between boys and girls in the interest of professional sport is significant at the level of 0.05% of statistical importance, when boys' preference is professional sport. Disinterest in any sport stated 9 boys and 3 girls.

The sports' achievements of our national team members as well as other world-famous athletes have a great impact on forming a positive attitude of children towards sports. More than half of the respondents (61.11 %) stated that they have never participated in educational events, where they would receive information about the impact of sports on the human body and as many as 77.71 % stated interest in taking part in such event. An even greater number of respondents (94.44 %) stated that they did not have a discussion with a famous athlete at school.

When evaluating the offer of sports activities, the majority of pupils surveyed stated they do not attend sports groups at school (62.86 %). As a reason for the lack of interest in offered sports activities at school, respondents most often stated disinterest in their content (20.28 %), that they are time-consuming (18.18 %), absence of suitable companions or friends (17.48 %), and long distance of sports sites from the residence (16.48 %). Interesting answers were stated by 10.98 % of respondents. As a reason for not participating in physical activities organized by the school they stated "parents prevent me from doing it".

Table 2. Is it possible to replace sports with labour (according to gender)?  $\chi=6.00$   $p=0.032^*$

| Number of answers<br>Percentage | boy          | girl         | TOTAL         |
|---------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| yes                             | 168<br>31.46 | 144<br>26.97 | 312<br>58.43  |
| no                              | 66<br>11.24  | 90<br>16.85  | 156<br>28.09  |
| I do not know                   | 21<br>3.93   | 51<br>9.55   | 72<br>13.48   |
| TOTAL                           | 255<br>46.63 | 285<br>53.37 | 540<br>100.00 |

Table 3. Is it possible to replace sports with labour (according to residence)?  $\chi=7.839$   $p=0.014^*$

| Number of answers<br>Percentage | in town      | in village   | TOTAL        |
|---------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| yes                             | 117<br>21.91 | 195<br>36.52 | 312<br>58.43 |
| no                              | 39<br>6.18   | 117<br>21.91 | 156<br>28.09 |
| I do not know                   | 9<br>1.69    | 63<br>11.80  | 72<br>13.48  |
| TOTAL                           | 165<br>29.78 | 375<br>70.22 | 540<br>100   |

Table 4. What sport would you like to do?  $\chi =1.817$   $p= 0.024^*$

| Number of answers<br>Percentage | boy          | girl         | TOTAL         |
|---------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| recreational sport              | 84<br>15.56  | 141<br>26.11 | 225<br>41.67  |
| professional sport              | 111<br>20.56 | 105<br>19.44 | 216<br>40.00  |
| I do not know                   | 51<br>9.44   | 36<br>6.67   | 87<br>16.11   |
| none                            | 9<br>1.67    | 3<br>0.56    | 12<br>2.22    |
| TOTAL                           | 255<br>47.22 | 285<br>52.78 | 540<br>100.00 |

Recently, we have recorded a decrease in children’s interest in sports, along with physical activities. However, several published studies show the growth of children’s interest in activities such as watching television, listening to music, learning foreign languages, computing (Vladovičová and Baisová 2002; Liba, 2000, 2008; and others). We also surveyed why some children cease to exercise and do sports. The pupils could have stated five reasons.

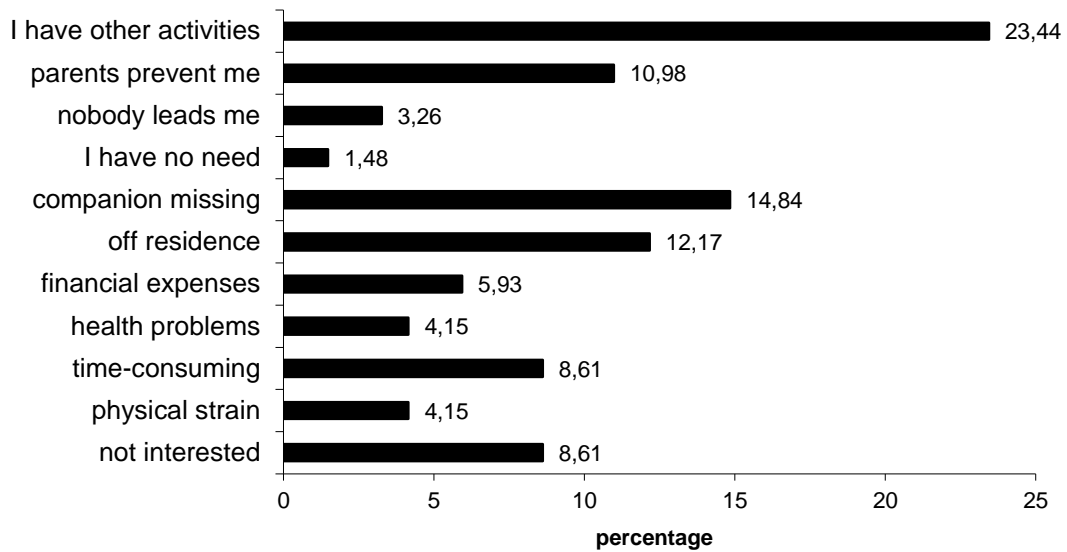


Figure 1. Reasons for children losing interest in exercise and sports

As can be seen from the above stated, the main reason for losing interest in sports and physical activities is that the subjects do not enjoy it. We assume that respondents expressed their opinion also on the fact that schools often offer less attractive sports activities that are boring for children, presently unsuitable to their interests. According to gender, in regards to the principal reason for loss of interest in sports, boys and girls stated the same answer: “not interested”. Even when stating another reason (“no place to do sports”) boys and girls reached an agreement. The boys need more school support (they stated the reason in 3<sup>rd</sup> place) and the girls miss companion for sports. Based on residence, pupils from towns stated the reasons for losing interest in sports in this order: they do not enjoy it, the school does not support them and they have no place to do sports. Pupils from rural areas stated the following three reasons: they are not interested in sports, they have no place to do sports and they have no companion to do sports with. The school as an institution is likely to have a greater impact in the rural areas than in the city.

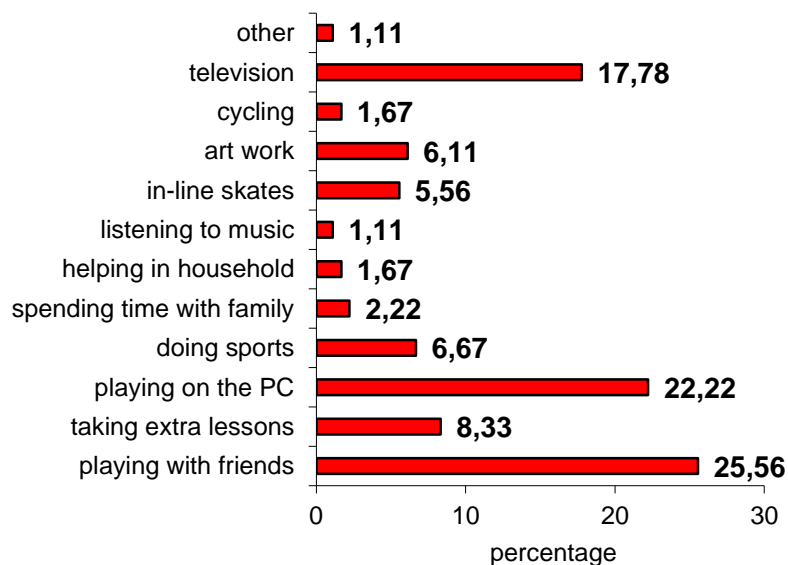


Figure 2. What pupils do in their free-time

As obvious from Picture 2, 13.9 % of children are doing sports activities in their free time. As a main reason, they stated the desire of being with friends or becoming good athletes. However, doing sports for health and fitness was a reason stated by none of the sporting respondents.

The evaluation of leisure activities according to gender showed statistically insignificant differences between boys and girls. Respondents stated at least the 5 most popular activities. The most significant differences were observed in the “taking extra lessons” entry. 39 girls spend time this way (13.68 %), while only 3 boys (1.17 %) chose this activity. Larger differences were observed in the “playing with my friends” response, this answer chosen by 120 girls (42.1 %) and 78 boys (30.6 %). In addition, boys spend significantly more time playing on the computer (25.8 %) in comparison to girls (18.9 %).

An analysis of responses to the question on who has a significant influence on respondents doing sports, confirmed that mainly parents affect children at this age. What we found interesting was the fact that the status of a teacher in this field is very weak, although they spend a lot of time with pupils at school. A strong motivating factor is also television, as children often watch it. We assumed that more than watching sports programs they watch entertainment programs.

Table 4. Motivating factors to do sports

| Number of answers<br>Percentage | boy         | girl        | TOTAL       |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| parents                         | 78<br>30.5  | 69<br>24.2  | 147<br>27.2 |
| friend                          | 30<br>11.76 | 27<br>9.47  | 57<br>10.5  |
| teacher                         | 12<br>4.7   | 30<br>10.5  | 42<br>7.8   |
| well-known athletes             | 21<br>8.24  | 21<br>7.37  | 42<br>7.8   |
| television                      | 33<br>12.94 | 30<br>10.5  | 63<br>11.7  |
| others                          | 30<br>11.76 | 33<br>11.57 | 63<br>11.7  |

### Conclusion

The level of knowledge of fourth-year pupils at the first stage of primary school on the need of sports for health was verified by the team of teachers of the Department of Physical Education and Sports of Faculty of Education at Matej Bel University in 1994, during the preparation of content standard from Physical Education for pupils leaving the 1<sup>st</sup> stage of primary education. The received results correspond with our present findings.

Our survey shows that:

- pupils surveyed know the effect of intentional physical activity on health, significant differences reflected in the responses to the question on whether it is possible to replace sports activity with labour (differences according to gender and place of residence),
- 70 % of respondents know the difference between recreational and professional sports, boys mainly preferring professional sports,
- the most common reason why children cease to exercise is that “they do not enjoy it”,

- respondents mainly spend their free time playing games with friends, playing computer games and watching TV, exercising and sports on 5<sup>th</sup> place in their hierarchy of free-time activities,
- nearly 40 % of pupils surveyed stated that their teacher does not motivate them to do sports.

The teacher and school play a significant role in children's upbringing. The status of the teacher as a key factor of the educational system is changing gradually as a result of the transformation efforts in our primary education. From the disseminator of knowledge, the teacher becomes a creator, motivator, organizer and consultant, simply a manager of the education process. The aim of the 1<sup>st</sup> stage in pupils education is the creation of prerequisites for lifelong learning, the creation of opportunities to acquire basic habits and skills for school and after-school work, and create motivation for learning, nevertheless creating the basis for a lifelong relationship to sports and recreational activities.

Through the analysis of the current state of this process, we wanted to know and identify the problems of school practice in relation to the formation of pupils' attitude to sports and recreational activities. The reason for particular focusing of the work was the knowledge that "Physical and Sports Education" at school and sports as well as recreational activities during extracurricular time are areas in which there are favourable conditions not only for enhancing health and physical and motor development, but also the formation of younger school-age pupils' personalities. As the results of our survey along with other studies indicate, (e.g. Bečáková et al., 2012; Bunc, 1996; Mužík, 1997; Novotná et al., 2009, Kolofík, 2015, Adamčák and Bartík, 2013), doing sports and exercise remain the only proclaimed need of a healthy lifestyle that will not be fulfilled for most children. The situation is not facilitated by closed sports school facilities, which are increasingly being used during extracurricular time by the employees of various companies and organizations more than by those for whom they were originally built.

From the survey results it can be deduced that the main motive for the exercising and sports of younger school-age children is the need to be in the company of friends. The manner of spending free-time also affects the formation of children's relationship to free-time as to personal and social value, and the formation of their lifestyle. According to Kratochvílova (1999), potentially and really the best prerequisites and possibilities for an active and qualified entry into children's free-time is possessed by the school institution itself, where the vast majority of the child population as well as teachers and educators is concentrated. Teachers and educators are technically qualified for educational activity. Although the school has spatial conditions, the financial means to organize and implement attractive and non-traditional leisure activities for pupils are lacking.

The child, as a member of a peer group, has the opportunity to learn to communicate, cooperate and compete. The role and status that the child has in such a group contributes to their self-assessment and self-identification. We believe that, although during younger school-age peer groups are set up on the basis of so-called light contact (visiting the same school or class, having the same interests, proximity of residence, etc.), such creation of new relationships is important as the basis of personality formation. We consider the grouping of children in order to do sports and recreational activities and thus use their free time meaningfully to be one of the important means in the prevention of pathologies of contemporary society at present, and as an important factor in the creation of a healthy lifestyle.

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УДК 37

**Актуальная проблема школьников – недостаточная физическая активность**<sup>1</sup> Барбора Новотна<sup>2</sup> Михаэла Словакова

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**Аннотация.** В статье авторы приводят результаты исследований научных знаний учащихся младшего школьного возраста о связи между физической активностью и здоровьем. Опрос проводился в рамках проекта "Вега" Грант № 1/0606/15. Анкета исследования на выборке из 540 учащихся показала, что респонденты ознакомлены с важностью физической активности для здоровья, однако, они теряют интерес к спорту и рекреационной деятельности. Свободное время они проводят большей частью в играх с друзьями, в компьютерных играх и за просмотром телевизора.

**Ключевые слова:** физическая активность, здоровье, ученик начальной школы.