

THE ATTITUDE OF LITHUANIAN SCHOOL STUDENTS (YOUNG BOYS AND TEENAGERS) TOWARDS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AS A VALUE TO STAY HEALTHY

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Abstract. *Goal of the study: identifying the attitude of students (young boys and teenagers) towards physical activity as a value to stay healthy, based on their age and place of residence. The scope of the study consisted of 99 seventh-grade students (45 of them originating from rural areas, 54 from towns and cities) and 96 tenth-grade students (44 of them originating from rural areas, 52 from towns and cities), a total of 195 school students, all of them young boys and teenagers from county N. The survey was conducted using a questionnaire constructed on a basis of questionnaire forms by I.J.Zuoziene (1998) and O.Batutis (2003). Conclusion. Regardless of their age and place of residence, Lithuanian school students (boys and teenagers) consider physical activity a value to stay healthy.*

Keywords: *attitude, healthy, physical activity, school students (boys and teenagers).*

Introduction

Lithuania's accession to the European Union has opened up new opportunities for a lively dialogue with the Western European culture, which rests on a bedrock of humanistic values and embodies the educational focus of its countries. Therefore, it is not by some incident that the curricula and educational plans of comprehensive schools accentuate that, whilst Lithuania is pursuing integration into the rapidly shifting global community, is bringing educational content up to speed, and is improving its quality, educating self-sufficient, constructively-minded individuals and imbuing them with value-based attitudes is of vital importance.

During school years, the value system of a person takes shape, and skills acquired in that period are retained for life. It was at that time that a person delves into a search for the meaning of life, engages in independent assessment of moral, political, aesthetical ideals, and builds their system of values. A young personality simply must go through the stage of value identification and construction (Sukys and Kardelis, 2001; Blauzdys and Vilkas, 2007; Sukys and Jankauskiene, 2008). A lot of scholars, educators, and physicians highlight health as a key value (Adaskeviciene, 2003; Cavill, et al. 2006; Volbekiene, Griuciute and Gaizauskiene, 2007; Emeljanovas, et al. 2010; Zaborskis and

Raskilas, 2011). Analysis of school students' attitude towards physical activity as a value to stay healthy is driven by the following reasons:

- ✓ decreasing levels of physical activity in children;
- ✓ children's deteriorating health;
- ✓ spread of unacceptable behaviour patterns in schools.

Encouragement of physical activity, ongoing exercise, physical culture, improving fitness, good cheer and the formation of all-round positive emotions, bolstering the capacities for mental and physical work, absence of diseases are all very important in order to develop a full-on personality that is spiritually enhanced, morally mature, and physically strong (Sukys and Kardelis, 2001; Jankauskiene, et al., 2011; Zaborskis and Raskilas, 2011).

Formation of healthy lifestyle attitudes is one of the underlying goals of educating students. It implies encouragement, development of healthy lifestyle habits and skills, and fortification of health (Vizbaraitė and Petronyte, 2005; Petronyte and Zaborskis, 2008). Research in the area of physical culture in schools is more focused on developing physical abilities in children rather than constructing children's focus on values, developing a positive approach to physical culture and healthy lifestyle (Adaskeviciene, 2003), and promoting motivation for physical activity (Sit and Lindner, 2005; Petronyte and Zaborskis, 2008). It is a known fact that the levels of physical activity of students diminish with age in many countries (Baubinas and Vainauskas, 1998; Zuoziene, 1998; Kardelis et al., 2001; Currie et al., 2004; Zaborskis and Raskilas, 2011).

For the subject of our study, we chose middle- and high-school age boys and teenagers, because their attitudes have been covered by research to a lesser extent.

Subject of the study: school students' (young boys' and teenagers') attitudes towards physical activity. **Hypothesis:** students display a positive attitude towards physical activity, perceiving it as a value to stay healthy. **Goal of the study:** identifying the attitude of students (young boys and teenagers) towards physical activity as a value to stay healthy, based on their age and place of residence.

Organisation of the study

Methods of the study: analysis of literary resources, survey, mathematical statistics.

The scope of the study consisted of 99 seventh-grade students (45 of them originating from rural areas, 54 from towns and cities) and 96 tenth-grade students (44 of them originating from rural areas, 52 from towns and cities), a total of 195 school students, all of them young boys and teenagers from county N. The survey was conducted using a questionnaire constructed on a basis of questionnaire forms by I.J. Zuoziene (1998) and O. Batutis (2003). The internal consistency of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.86).

The survey of the students was conducted with consent from school management and the students' parents. The anonymous survey took place during class hours in 2008. Every student polled participated in the survey on voluntary basis. The statistical analysis of the data was carried out using the SPSS 13.0 statistical data processing package, with χ^2 (chi-squared criterion) applied to compare the results across groups. A difference was considered to have statistical relevance when $p < 0.05$.

The results

The analysis of the attitude of the school students involved in the study towards the importance of physical culture and sports to a person's health has revealed it to be positive. More than 90 per cent of seventh-grade students from rural areas and towns, and tenth-grade students from towns and cities believe that physical culture and sports help one fortify their health, boost physical powers and ability to work.

The respondents' opinions on the frequency of doing sports and exercising to improve one's health varied, albeit with minor disparities (Fig. 1).

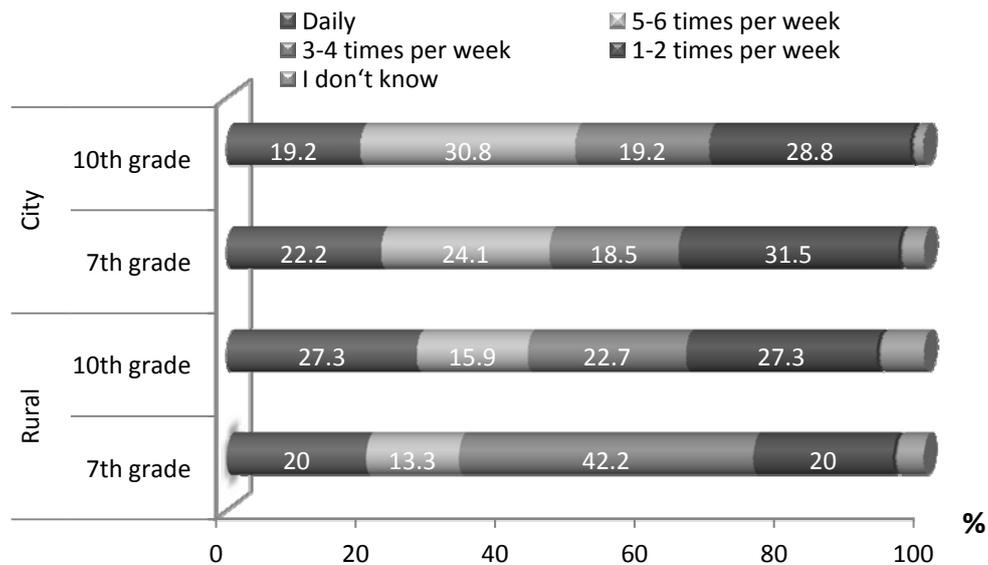


Fig. 1 Breakdown of answers to question “How many times weekly should one exercise to be able to see an improvement in health condition?” ($p > 0.05$)

Seventh-grade rural students believe that a person should exercise 3 to 4 times per week (42.2%), while their peers from towns and cities think that the optimum amount of exercise is 1 to 2 times per week (31.5%). 27.3% of tenth-grade students from rural areas think that exercise is a thing to be done daily; the same corpus of rural students believe that exercise should be taken 1–2 times per week. However, 30.8% of their city peers think that exercise has to be done 5–6 times per week.

Most students recognise the beneficial effect that physical activity has on health, admitting that they like physical culture classes, because these are good for their health. That was the opinion of 86.7% and 85.2% of seventh-grade students in rural and city schools, respectively, and 61.4% and 82.7% of tenth-grade students in rural areas and towns and cities, respectively (Fig. 2). The opinions of tenth-grade students residing in different areas diverged with a certain degree of reliability ($p < 0.05$; $\chi^2(3) = 11.97$): in rural areas, students enjoy their physical education classes for the chance of fun-filled activity that they afford.

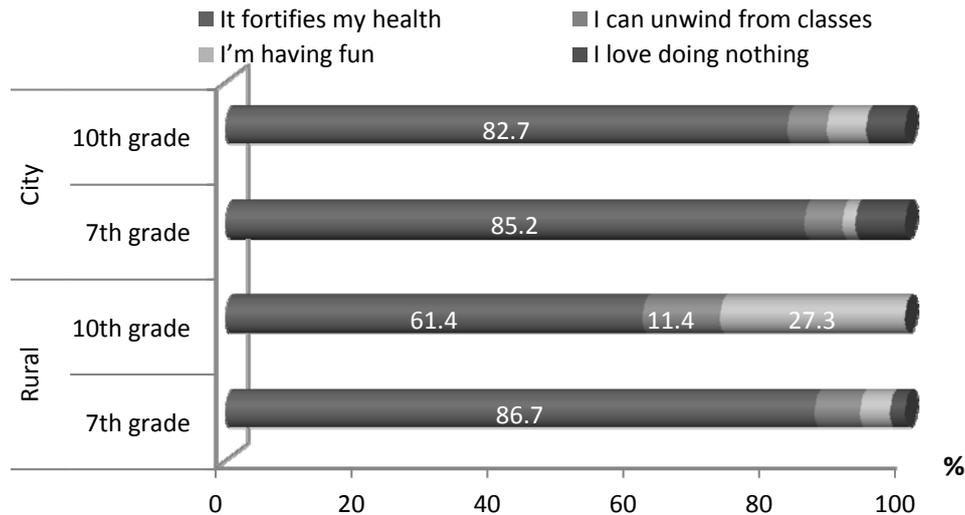


Fig. 2 Breakdown of answers to question “What do you like about physical culture classes the most?”

Note: $p < 0.05$ ($\chi^2(3) = 11.97$) for tenth-grade students’ answers compared.

There were no statistically significant differences in the opinions of seventh-grade rural and city students in terms of the core values in a person’s life (Fig. 3). Speaking of which, students in rural areas identified health (17.8%), recognition and people’s respect (17.8%), and being useful to the society (17.8%). City dwellers highlighted education and self-improvement (25.9%), health (18.5%), recognition and people’s respect (11.4%) as essential values.

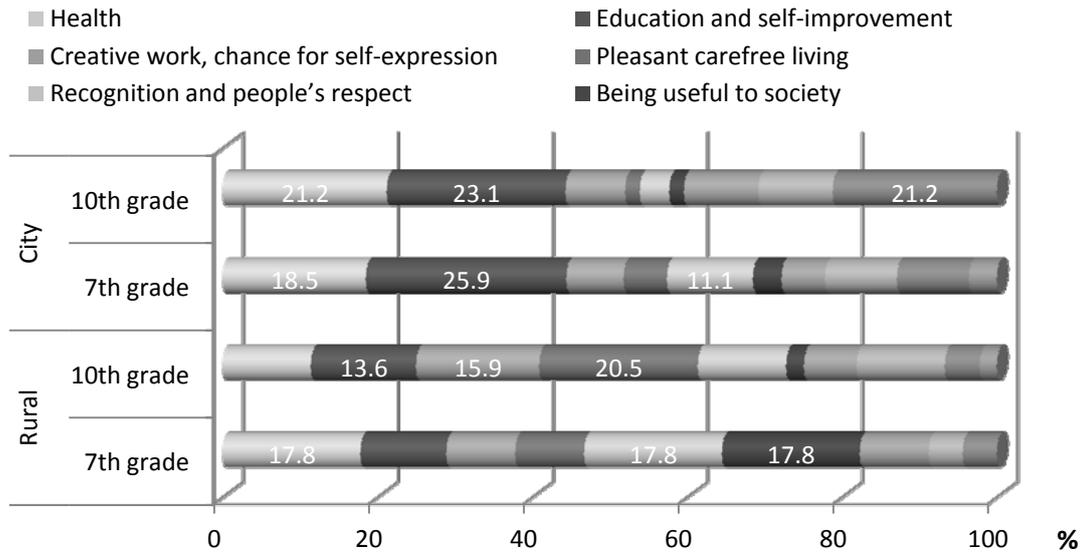


Fig. 3 Breakdown of answers to question “What values are the most important in a person’s life?”

Note: $p < 0.05$ ($\chi^2(9) = 19.96$) for tenth-grade rural and city students’ answers compared

Young people living in rural areas and in towns and cities demonstrated significantly different opinions on the key values in a person’s life ($\chi^2(9) = 19.96$; $p < 0.05$). City residents identified education and self-improvement (23.1%), health (21.2%), and money and material well-being (21.2%) as core. Those living in rural areas think that the values that matter the most are pleasant carefree living (20.5%), creative work and possibility of self-expression (15.9%), education and self-improvement (13.6%).

Analysis of the respondents’ answers to questions about the traits of personality that physical culture and sports helped develop did not disclose any material differences ($p > 0.05$) both with regard to age and place of residence (Fig. 4).

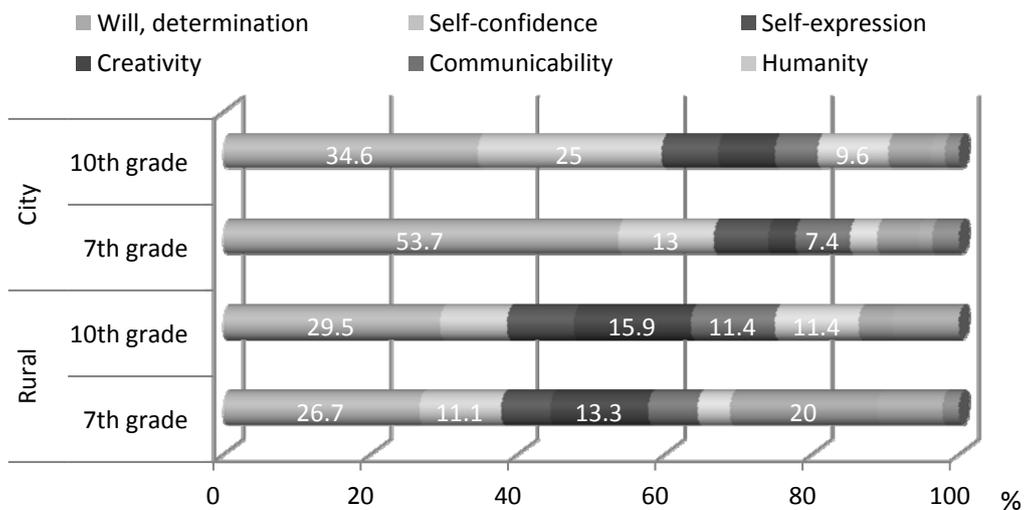


Fig. 4 Breakdown of answers to question “What positive traits of personality does physical culture and sports help develop?” ($p > 0.05$)

Notably, the predominant answer was that physical culture and sports help nurture will and determination, as specified by 26.7–53.7% of the students. One-fifth (20%) younger rural students also pointed that said pastime was good for one's self-esteem, and one-fourth (25%) city teenagers believed it bolstered one's self-confidence.

Discussion

Physical activity is one of the critical health-fortifying elements. The results of the study have showed that Lithuanian school students (young boys and teenagers) shared a positive attitude towards physical activity, with most of the respondents understanding that physical culture and sports help fortify one's health, boost physical powers and ability to work. This supports data from previous studies (Zuoziene, 1998; Sit et al., 2005; Vizbaraite and Petronyte, 2005; Petronyte and Zaborskis, 2008).

However, the students polled are not fully aware as to how many times sports-related activities should be pursued and exercise taken in a week to be able to see an improvement in health condition, with students both from rural areas and towns and cities providing variegated answers. No significant differences were identified in the opinions from rural and city students, which prompts that physical education teachers employed at rural and urban schools alike have not made substantial efforts to explain it to their students how much athletic activity and exercise it takes to stay healthy, and to become healthier still. Quite a few researchers (Zuoziene, 1998; Blauzdys and Jasiunas, 2000; Adaskeviciene, 2003; Bagdoniene and Blauzdys, 2005; Balevičiute and Poteliūnienė, 2006; Blauzdys and Vilkas, 2007) have identified a gap in students' knowledge of the effects of physical activity on health.

Another finding that the study has produced was that one-third (31.5%) younger students in towns and cities believe that pursuing sports during physical culture classes alone is enough to maintain or achieve a healthy physical condition. Whereas as many as 44.2% of their peers from rural areas think that compulsory physical culture classes at school are not enough and that one should do sports and exercise 3–4 times per week. The opinions of teenagers paint quite the opposite picture: 30.8% of city dwellers said that it takes 5–6 times to do sports and exercise weekly to stay healthy and fortify one's health, whilst only 15.9% of their peers from rural areas shared this view.

In conclusion, it can be said that with age, students in urban schools tend to be more aware of the importance of physical activity to health, while students in rural areas display a contrary trend.

Most of the students polled enjoy their physical culture classes because of their health-fortifying effect. This supports the results obtained by other researchers (Baubinas and Vainauskas, 1998; Zuoziene, 1998; Kardelis et al., 2001; Sit et al., 2005; Vizbaraite and Petronyte, 2005; Petronyte and Zaborskis, 2008). The students identified different positive traits of personality that physical culture

and sports help develop. All of the groups surveyed pointed that this type of activity helped build one's will, determination, self-confidence, and self-esteem. A lot of scholars (Sukys and Kardelis, 2001; Sniras and Malinauskas, 2006; Blauzdys and Vilkas, 2007; Sukys and Jankauskiene, 2008; Tilindiene et al., 2010) have admitted that involvement in athletic pastime positively affects self-esteem, self-respect, character, creativity, value system, helps a person shake bad habits and integrate into the society.

High levels of physical activity pursued at leisure are usually driven by focus on values that students prioritise on (Малозёмов, 2005; Mota, Santos and Ribeiro, 2008). In our study, education and self-improvement, health, and material well-being is considered by students the core values in a person's life.

This means that the students did not identify health as value number one. This supports the data from a study by K. Kardelis et al. (2001), in which physical education teachers polled said that as many as 17.6% boys and 10.6% girls were completely disinterested in matters pertaining to healthy living. Moreover, the number of students who are unable to attend physical culture classes for health-related issues is growing (Kardelis et al., 2001).

The hypothesis that was raised in the study – that students possess a positive attitude towards physical activity and perceive physical activity as a value to stay healthy – checked out. However, what became evident was that depending on age and location, Lithuanian boys and teenagers do not see health as the most important value. One way to explain it could be that children generally feel well, or rather well in their teens (Zuoziene, 1998; Kardelis et al., 2001; Sit et al., 2005; Petronyte and Zaborskis, 2008), and therefore do not tend to consider good health as the ultimate value, rather thinking about their plans for the foreseeable future. Another reason could be the absence of an adult role model in their immediate surroundings, for how many teachers and parents are physically active enough?

It is a known fact that one of the key elements that affect the development of a personality is the school, where the student is ready to absorb a variety of information. Yet the high hopes that are connected to school which has the task of preparing a new member of the society for life, developing him to be a citizen of his own country, complete with an adequate view of life and values, health being one of them, sometimes tend to fall short. The school gives young people knowledge, but does not develop real-life social skills or build a solid attitude to values. So far, Lithuanian authorities have not reached any kind of agreement either on a common educational health-related methodology or the bodies that will bring it to fruition. Integrated delivery of theoretical knowledge and formation of hands-on skills, close cooperation between teachers, physicians, psychologists, and parents would improve students' self-awareness of physical activity as a value to stay in good health.

Conclusion

Regardless of their age and place of residence, Lithuanian school students (boys and teenagers) consider physical activity a value to stay healthy.

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