

## **POSITION OF SPORT IN LEISURE-TIME ACTIVITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

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## **MESTO ŠPORTA V PROSTOČASNIH DEJAVNOSTIH MLADINE V ČEŠKI REPUBLIKI**

### **Abstract**

The main purpose was to highlight the present structure of leisure time of 16 to 17 year-old youth, mainly the position of sport and exercise in their leisure-time activities. More than 500 secondary school students and apprentices answered our questionnaire. We were interested in their hobbies, their participation in organized and non-organized sports and physical activities. We examined which leisure time and sports activities dominate and are preferred in this age group. Attention was paid to the respondents' opinion on sport and physical activities as parts of their life. In this respect, gender differences were also analysed.

*Keywords: leisure time, youth, sport, gender, Czech Republic*

### **IZVLEČEK**

Glavni namen dela je bil osvetliti trenutno strukturo prostega časa mladine med 16. in 17. letom starosti, predvsem mesto športa in telesnih aktivnosti v njihovih prostočasnih dejavnostih. Vprašalnik je izpolnilo več kot 500 srednješolcev in vajencev. Vprašanja so se nanašala na njihove hobije ter udeležbo v organiziranih in neorganiziranih športih in drugih telesnih aktivnostih. Ugotavljali smo katere prostočasne in športne aktivnosti prevladujejo, oziroma so najbolj zaželjene v tej starostni skupini. Zanimala so nas tudi mnenja respondentov o športu in telesnih aktivnostih, kot integralnem delu njihovega življenja. tu smo analizirali tudi razlike med spoloma.

*Ključne besede: čas, mladina, šport, spol, Republika Češka*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the period of adolescence, the biological development completes, the value system and life style shape. This is important not only for this age but also for the future life of the individual. Variety of interests and sufficient exercise are essential for a healthy life style. In consequence this will reflect in the overall state of health of the population. As various studies show (11, 3), in this period of life there are several important sources of exercise - sport, non-competitive exercise (e.g., dancing, keep-fit activities).

Sport and exercise bring about a spell of rest and entertainment and they are a source of new knowledge and skills. They allow being a member of a group which is a feature of team sports. Spending leisure time in a group is very attractive for young people even if in the form individual sports or exercises. In such a group, a young person learns to co-operate, respect each other and many other social skills.

Sports and exercise develop various motor skills and abilities which apply not only in these activities but also in everyday life. The fact that a person is able to do a certain activity makes it easier for him to get involved in active sport activities and exercise in adulthood (2). These skills do not reflect themselves only in sports and physical training part of life. Mastering these skills improves self esteem and increases self confidence (1). Skills received from sport activities have a positive impact on fulfilling labor conscriptions (6) because those who take active part in sports have a lower accident and illness-related absence rate.

This is the reason why we paid interest to the way young people spend their free time and what is the role of sports and exercises in their leisure time.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE SURVEY

Since more and more young people prefer passive spending of leisure time which brings about insufficient exercise, the objectives of this survey are a scientific verification of this situation on selected groups of young people.

We surveyed the leisure time structure of activities of young people and the place of sports and exercise in their leisure time. We paid special interest to which activities young people prefer, which kinds of activities are attractive to young people and what

keeps them from deeper involvement in leisure time activities.

## METHODS

Here presented data create one part of our larger survey which examined sports and leisure time as a prevention of drug use/abuse (10). In compliance with the purposes of our survey, we used a method of questionnaire investigation.

In this field a universal methodology does not exist in our country because authors consider problems of leisure time spending, sports and exercises from the perspective of their own fields of interest and tasks of studies. We can see the similar situation in other countries. The problem of missing general methodology in this area gives very small possibility to use and compare results of various researches. In this situation, we constructed a questionnaire especially suitable for our purposes. But many items were the same or based on studies with a similar topic (5, 7, 8, 9, 12). Respondents chose one option, in some cases even three offered options (closed questions), or filled in the required information. Some questions were in a form of a gamut. Extent of involvement in individual activities was evaluated by frequency of occurrence. Two statistic characteristics were used to describe leisure time spending of the study sample: percents and chi-square test. As a criteria for finding differences between groups being observed we chose gender and regular participation in sports and exercises within the framework of organized forms.

Obtained data were processed with the help of the EPIINFO. This statistic PC programme developed and freely given by World Health Organisation is suitable for epidemiological tasks.

## DATA GATHERING AND ENSEMBLING

In the fall of 1994, the questionnaires were distributed to third years of junior and technical high schools in Prague and other large cities in central and north regions of Bohemia who were interested in co-operating. We have used members of the research team and also the help of teachers who received instructions and a brief description on how to fill in the questionnaires. There were 540 students questioned, 275 females and 265 males. There were 43.3% of students of high schools, 28.7% were technical high school students and the rest (28%) were vocational school students.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Leisure time activities

Table 1 shows the share of individual interest activities in leisure time spending of the observed group. Dividing the leisure time activities into groups results from studies focusing on this topic (5, 9, 12). According to the frequency of individual activities we considered the extent of interest in them and their place in leisure time structure.

It is obvious that respondents spend most of their leisure time watching television and listening to radio etc. However, we should also consider the fact that young people often use recorded music as a background for other activities. The data corresponds with information received from Teplý's similar study (12) and with information presented on the adult population (e.g. 13). The third most frequent activity is reading books and magazines.

Another leisure time activity which takes an important place in lives of observed individuals is contact and spending time with friends and peers. Almost 40% of respondents spend their time in a group with their peers or friends more than three times a week. This confirms that people of this age have a tendency to be a part of some group.

Getting involved in creative and artistic activities falls far behind the above-stated activities. In this group, interest in music (playing an instrument, singing) has the largest representation (31.9%). Approximately 30% of questioned individuals showed a positive ap-

proach towards nature because they are animal lovers, they are interested in conservationism, etc. About a quarter of respondents are interested in art and manual activities such as painting, crafts, modelling. Only a small number of respondents shows serious interest in it (i.e. more than 3 times per week).

We have also observed whether boys and girls have a different way of spending time. We have found great differences in reading books and magazines, interest in nature and computer science. We found that 10% more girls than boys include reading into their leisure time and among girls there are also less girls who do not read at all (Chi-square=19,55). A similar situation occurs in nature-related hobbies where 10% more girls include these into their weekly programme and 10% more boys do not include this in their programme at all (Chi-square=9,74).

As far as music-related activities are concerned, there is a much bigger group of boys (52.8%) than girls (36.2%) who do not show any interest at all (Chi-square=30,61). By contrast, boys prefer more go to the movies (Chi-square=14,63). They go there weekly more frequently (18% versus 8.1%). We have found a very striking difference in an activity which is fairly new in the structure of young population's leisure time – working with a computer or playing computer games (or slot machines). Here we find that boys show higher intensity of interest than girls (Chi-square=77,60). There are 31.8% boys versus 9.4% girls who include this activity into their weekly programme. There are also more girls (65.7%) than

Table 1: Leisure time activities (excl. exercise and sport activities)

interest	frequency of occurrence (%)					
	more than 3x a week	1-2x a week	weekly	at least 1x a moth	less than 1x a month	never
watching TV	77.2	20.7	97.9	1.3	0.6	0.2
listening to radio, tapes	82.1	13.8	95.9	1.5	1.0	1.6
reading	50.1	35.7	85.8	8.7	2.1	3.4
peers	36.8	39.0	75.8	8.7	7.0	8.5
music (singing, playing,e.i.)	16.5	15.4	31.9	9.9	13.8	44.4
nature	16.8	13.6	30.3	10.4	17.3	42.0
artistic and manual activ.	7.1	16.5	23.6	16.3	21.6	38.5
computers, computer games	7.6	13.1	20.7	10.9	19.7	48.7
movies, theatre	2.6	10.1	12.7	38.5	40.4	8.4

Table 2: Obstacles for involvement in interest activities and sports and exercises

what makes greater involvement difficult	% of respondents			
	leisure time activities		sports and exercise activities	
first three places	boys	girls	boys	girls
nothing	21.4	14.2	28.7	20.0
I am sufficiently involved	14.2	6.7	16.0	17.7
lack of time	49.8	66.4	47.2	52.8
I do not know where the activity is organized	6.5	6.8	2.2	6.4
the course is full	0.7	1.8	3.6	9.8
I do not have friends to do this activity with	6.9	7.1	3.6	11.3
there is no place in my home or close to it	10.5	10.9	9.5	10.5
lack of money	30.5	20.0	17.8	14.4
health problems	–	–	2.1	8.9

boys (32.1%) who do not work or play with computers in their leisure time. We did not consider whether it was working or playing with a computer.

Respondents were asked which other activity they would like to do in their leisure time or which activity they would like to do more frequently. Obtained answers show wishes of young people and the measure of their satisfaction with the leisure time contents. About 70% of the examined boys and 87% of the girls answered this question. Most of the respondents would like to spend their leisure time doing sports, exercises and dancing (more than 30%, same with girls and boys). Almost 20% of the girls, but only about 10% of the boys would like to include more creative and artistic activities, like playing a musical instrument, drawing, acting, taking photographs, etc. These are followed by culturally perceptual hobbies like reading, going to theatres and exhibi-

tions. Some would like to get further education, study languages. This has been stated especially by girls (about 6%).

The biggest obstacle to interest activities is, according to the respondents' answers, unequivocally a lack of free time. This is the main problem for 40% of the respondents. To show the potential obstacles we present their frequency on the first three places of the relevance scale. As far as activities that they would like to spend their time on are concerned, there is an interesting fact that boys usually think that their structure of leisure time is adequate and they see less obstacles to be involved than girls. About 30% of the boys and 20% of the girls have mentioned financial problems. These concern one half of respondents who consider their family as very poor or poor. This question was answered by 95% of the boys and girls.

Tables 3: Participation in sports and physical education

form of sport or exercise	frequency of activity (%)				
	more than 3x a week	1-2x a week	weekly	less than 1x a week	never
school-obligatory	10.8	85.2	96.0	0.8	3.2
school club	1.6	7.2	8.8	8.9	82.3
competitive	20.0	6.1	26.1	3.6	70.3
sport in clubs non-competitive	7.6	9.1	16.7	7.5	75.8
sport in clubs spontaneous	23.4	39.0	62.4	24.6	13.0

## Sports and exercises

Close analysis of gathered data and Table 3 show how involved respondents get in sports and exercises, including exercise activities like dancing. Spontaneous activities get the biggest share. However, only about one quarter of the respondents state that they are involved in three or more times a week. We can understand this frequency as a sign of a very intensive participation in sports and exercises. Of course, there is a question whether respondents were not exaggerating these facts.

Only a little more than a fifth of the respondents do organized sports and exercises very intensively because they go to sport clubs three and more times a week. There is one half of boys and 41% girls who use the opportunity of organized sport and exercise activities on a regular basis, i.e. at least once a week. Boys prefer competitive sports because 31% of them are organized there, and only 21% of the girls. Girls mostly attend non-competitive sports and exercises. Altogether there are 47% of the boys and 46% of the girls who attend organized forms of sports and exercises. As an organized form of sport we also understand participation in school sport clubs. Their share of participation of the observed group is small. Nowadays, i.e. in the 1994, the situation is worse in comparison with the situation ten years ago. Less than 10% of the 16-17 year-old youth are involved there. The table 3 shows the share of the students' involvement in the obligatory physical education, even though the leisure sports activities are analysed in this study. The reason is to give a complete view of the organized sports forms. The analysis of all these forms brings a notable warning fact. Outside obligatory school physical education there are 24% of the boys and 18% of the girls who do not do sports or exercises, spontaneous or organized, on a regular basis, i.e. at least once a week.

Examining preferred kinds of sports and exercises we find some differences between boys and girls (respondents could state three sports that they like best). Similar findings appear in other works, too (3). Boys definitely like team ball games the most. For 25.4% of the boys, soccer was the most popular sport among the three which they stated. Basketball follows with 17.1% and ice hockey is the third (16.1%). These are followed by individual sports and sports depending on weather - cycling (15.3%), skiing and snowboarding (14.4%), tennis (13.0%). Volleyball (12%) took the last position before really individual sports like body building and working out (11.6%), swimming (9.0%) and martial arts like karate, judo, aikido, etc. (9.0%). Almost 8% of the boys did not state any sport or exercise.

Girls are more interested in activities related to body and motion cultivation. Girls prefer swimming (29%) and physical condition oriented exercises with music (aerobics, calanetics - 24%). The most popular team sport is volleyball (25.8%) in the second place and basketball is the fourth (17.3%). These games are most often taught in high schools. These are followed by mostly individual sports and activities - skiing (17.3%), dancing (16.6%). Cycling is getting popular (13.5%). Running is also slightly more popular with girls. Girls (especially from agricultural schools) showed interest in horse-racing (10.2%).

Above mentioned boys' and girls' differences are usual and often named (e. g. 4). It is obvious that boys show greater interest in team sports, competitive activities and excitement. Girls like more keep-fit activities especially with their positive influence on body image.

The presented differences in sport and exercise activity preferences between boys and girls are probably connected with their passive interest in sports. Almost twice as many boys than girls watch sport commentary on a regular basis or often. They also read sport press, which is in these days mainly focused on information about top competitions and sportsmen, especially about team sport competitions. On the contrary, there are twice as many girls than boys who pay interest to sports only sometimes.

When asked about the obstacles to participation in sports, respondents state that the biggest problem is a lack of time. It is the same with other leisure time activities. Respondents do not consider the objective obstacles (the course is full, there is a lack of facilities, etc.) as very relevant with sports and all other leisure time activities. In Table 3 we can note that girls have a certain tendency to do the leisure time activities, therefore even sports, in groups with friends. Girls complain about health problems more often.

The respondents' attitude towards sports can be seen in Table 4. There is an obvious difference between young people who take part in organized forms of sports and individuals who do sports or exercises spontaneously or not at all. For almost 90% organized sportsmen, sports and exercises are necessary. Only about one half of non-organized respondents consider sport as necessary. Three respondents did not answer this question.

We also considered whether there is a difference in the structure of interest activities in groups of respondents who are organized in sports and those

Table 4: Opinion of importance of sport and exercises (%)

	whole group	non-organized	organized
they are important and necessary	71.1	55.6	88.6
they are not so necessary	27.4	41.6	11.2
they are not at all necessary	1.5	2.8	0.0

who prefer spontaneous sports. Only in the field of artistic and manual activities have we found a 10% difference in favor of non-organized respondents. Sports and exercises enrich leisure time of the set of our respondents and it is not an obstacle for other leisure time activities.

## CONCLUSION

We think that surveying the structure of interests and place of sports and exercises in young peoples' lives is important. An adequate structure of free time and wide spectrum of interests is a premise for a non problematic development of this population group. Sports and exercises also contribute very much to health.

On the basis of information from this survey we assume that there should be a larger concern about the leisure time of young people. The reason for this is not only the prevailing share of passive entertainment which is more easily available in these days, but also a lack of free time which respondents have stated so frequently. This lack of free time can be caused by subjective reasons like bad management of time but also by objective reasons among which there are many school obligations (which many of them stated in their answers), time-loss caused by commuting. There was a surprisingly low share of obstacles for spending free time awarded to providing sport or lack of leisure time centres and sports facilities.

Comparison of our information and results of a similar study which was done ten years ago (12) shows that the situation in sports and exercises as part of leisure time, is getting worse, especially when considering participation in organized forms of sports and exercises. Sports either lose their attractiveness for young people, which of course is not supported by the responses to the question - which leisure time activity the respondents would like to spend more time on - or there is not enough stimulation and conditions for participation. This is why it is necessary to

look for ways to support the place of active exercise in young peoples' leisure time. It is necessary to use gained knowledge on motivation for this activity and improve conditions for organized physical education and sports. We consider schools to be the main place where this could be implemented. This corresponds with the role of schools in education and also with contemporary world trends to involve schools in health supporting.

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