



Habits and Attitudes of First Year Students at Warmia & Mazury University, Poland regarding Healthy Lifestyle

Robert Podstawski¹, Katarzyna Górnik², Renata Gizinska³

¹Department of Physical Education and Sport, University of Warmia & Mazury in Olsztyn, Prawocheńskiego Olsztyn, Poland. ²University of Szczecin, Faculty of Geosciences, Chair of Recreation, Mickiewicza, Szczecin, Poland. ³Faculty of Technical Sciences, Chair of Machines and Separation Processes, University of Warmia & Mazury in Olsztyn, Oczapowskiego, Olsztyn, Poland.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The 1st year of university studies is the last period during which the attitudes and habits of young adults can be shaped and that is why it is so important to accurately assess their lifestyles and needs. **Aim:** The aim of the study was to assess the habits and attitudes of 640 first-year male students attending the Warmia & Mazury University in Olsztyn regarding their lifestyles, health risks and possible preventive measures. **Method:** Students were randomly chosen from groups attending obligatory P.E. lessons. A self-administered anonymous questionnaire, containing questions regarding physical activity, personal hygiene and sanitary conditions, nutrition, stress, tobacco and alcohol use, and the students' interest in gaining knowledge on health-related topics, was used. The obtained results were characterized by descriptive statistics. **Results:** The majority of the students reported participating only in obligatory P.E. lessons in high school and less than a third expressed a willingness to participate in such lessons throughout their university education. Many students reported drinking alcohol regularly, even as often as every day, and nearly half of them smoked. Most students considered stressful situations to be unavoidable and a large percentage of them expressed an interest in gaining knowledge on coping with this. The overall interest in health related topics was found to be quite low. **Conclusions:** The habits and attitudes of 1st year male university students are not interested in physical activity, but largely dependent on alcohol and tobacco. Despite the fact that these students expressed the need to change some behaviors and gain knowledge on a few specific health topics, their motivation to lead a healthy lifestyle can be treated as low.

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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: Dr Katarzyna Górnik, University of Szczecin, Faculty of Geosciences, Chair of Recreation, Mickiewicza 16, 70-383 Szczecin, Poland. Email: kgornik@o2.pl

Introduction

Everyday behaviors and attitudes have a significant effect on our health. It is well known and documented that physical activity, nutrition, and certain psychosocial factors (i.e., hygiene, stress, smoking and alcohol consumption) play important roles in maintaining health and preventing diseases (1, 2). The changing lifestyles and diets of adults along with a decrease in physical activity lead to functional disturbances of the nervous, digestive, cardiovascular, and respiratory systems as well as lipid metabolism and metabolic diseases. These conditions automatically deteriorate the quality of life (3). It is a well-known fact that a sedentary lifestyle connected with a low level of physical activity has become a serious health concern in both, developed and developing countries (4). Numerous studies have revealed that physical activity can significantly diminish the risk of cardiovascular diseases, obesity, diabetes, and other chronic illnesses (5, 6).

In Poland and throughout the world there is a growing interest of researchers in promoting a healthy lifestyle and preventing health risks. However, not much attention has been given to young adults' health (1). From a public health perspective, university students have become important subjects in Poland (7-11) as well as other countries (12-15). The commencement of studies and time spent at the university constitute a critical moment in the promotion of a healthy lifestyle. Away from the family home and parents' influence, students more and more often make independent choices about their life and often take risky decisions associated with the abuse psychoactive substances such as alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs. In addition, due to the large amount of time spent attending university classes and studying, many students are forced to eat in a hurry and therefore consume fast food, which is high in calories and of low nutritional value (15). Moreover, this period in life also encompasses a multitude of stress factors and so it is important for students to acquire knowledge on coping with stress and assume pro-health behaviors to strengthen their overall health.

The aim of the study conducted among 1st year male students at the University of Warmia & Mazury (UWM) in Olsztyn was to assess their habits and attitudes towards a healthy lifestyle. The study aim was realized by attempting to answer the following question:

1. Do the students' lifestyles and attitudes promote a healthy life?

Method

Ethical consideration

The research was carried out with prior approval of the Ethical Committee of UWM, and the volunteers willingly agreed to participate in the study, which they confirmed by signing a written consent form.

Study sample

The research was conducted on a total of 640 1st year male students enrolled at the UWM in the summer semester of the 2007/2008 school year. Sixty groups of students totaling 640 men were chosen, using random selection tables (16) from a total of 250 groups attending P.E. lessons. The participants were students of various faculties and constituted over 96% of males aged 19-20 in the selected groups. This number was determined based on the technical possibilities of surveying the study participants during a single week. Only those students who, for whatever reasons, were absent on the day of the studies were excluded from the research. First year students were specifically chosen because they are a particularly valuable research group, as it is still possible to shape and alter their health attitudes and habits. Moreover, this study constitutes the fifth stage of cross-sectional studies, which have been systematically conducted biannually since 2000 (9-11). The vast majority of students were permanent residents of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie voivodeship.

We also assessed whether the number of participants is sufficient and therefore, if the group can be considered as representative. The following formula was used for this purpose (1):

$$n = \frac{\mu_{\alpha}^2}{4d^2}, \quad (1)$$

Where:

d – maximum (acceptable) estimation error. μ_{α} – value read from the normal distribution table N(0.1) at the accepted significance level of $1 - \alpha$. for the accepted level of significance $1 - \alpha = 0.95$ ($\mu_{\alpha} = 1.96$) it was assumed that the estimation error does not exceed 5% (17). The necessary amount of participants was established as 385 and therefore lower than the actual number accounted for in the studies (640). That is why the study group can be considered homogenous and representative for the population of 1st year male UWM students.

Data collection tool

The anonymous questionnaire consisted of 27 questions (including 20 closed-ended and 7 open-ended questions). Open-ended questions enabled the students to freely express their response to the given questions. The questions dealt with issues such as: physical activity, physical fitness, nutrition, personal hygiene, sanitary conditions, alcohol and tobacco use, stress, and gaining knowledge on health. The last part of the questionnaire contained personal information including gender, age, place of residence while at university, place of permanent residence, and location as well as type of secondary school completed.

Statistical analysis

The analysis of results used descriptive statistics and statistical calculations were performed with using the Statistica PL v. 10 software package (18).

Result

The study group is characterized in table 1. The remaining part of the study results have been divided into the following categories of human behaviors influencing health: physical activity, personal hygiene, nutrition, sanitary conditions, alcohol/tobacco use, reaction to stress, and knowledge and interest on public health. The results have been presented in tables 2-6.

The highest percentage of students reported renting accommodation (43.08%), and approximately 1/3 stated that they live at home (29.56%). Only 21.70% of them lived on campus. The highest number of research participants were residents of large cities with a population of over 100 thousand (28.59%). The vast majority of them were graduates of public secondary schools (67.03%). Less than a quarter of students finished vocational schools and even fewer (9.22%) - other types of secondary schools. The highest percentages of students were graduates of schools located in large cities (33.86%) or big towns (20-50 thousand inhabitants – 26.96%).

Table 1: Background information on the respondents

Residence during studies											
Dormitory		Rented room		Family Home		Boarding school		Other		Total	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
138	21.70	274	43.08	188	29.56	6	0.94	30	4.72	636	100

Place of permanent residence											
Village		Town population size								Total	
		< 20 000		20-50 000		50-100 000		>100 000			
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
109	17.03	128	20.00	149	23.28	71	11.09	183	28.59	640	100

Table 1: Continued

Place of secondary school completed											
Village		Town population size								Total	
		< 20 000		20-50 000		50-100 000		>100 000			
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
22	3.45	140	21.94	172	26.96	88	13.79	216	33.86	638	100

Type of secondary school completed							
Public Secondary School		Vocational school		Other Secondary School		Total	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
429	67.03	152	23.75	59	9.22	640	100

Physical activity

The behaviors and attitudes of 1st year students regarding physical activity are presented in table 2. The survey showed that almost half (48.73%) of the students took part in only one type of physical activity during secondary school. Nearly 40% of the respondents (37.03%) indicated two forms of physical activity, while a mere 12.66% indicated three. The vast majority of those surveyed (82.34%) stated that they had not been forced to limit their physical activity (for example due to illness, injuries, personal matters etc). The remainder of students periodically (15.94%) or permanently (1.72%) limited certain forms of physical activity offered during the obligatory P.E. lessons in secondary school.

Nearly all of the questioned men (91.41%) indicated obligatory P.E. lessons as the most frequent form of physical activity. Approximately a quarter of them declared exercising alone or sporadically with family (23.28%). A comparable percentage of respondents participated in school and outside of school sports clubs (19.22% and 19.84% respectively). Activities organized by collegiate sports clubs, the Society for the Propagation of Physical Culture, and other such organizations were even less popular. Very few students (0.78%) did not take part in any kind of physical activity, and only one was involved with the Academic Sports Association (Table 2).

Due to the fact that adolescents and young adults often refrain from any forms of physical activity

in secondary school as well as during their studies, the respondents were asked about the nature and form of P.E. classes attended at university. The study revealed that almost the same percentages of students believe that P.E. classes should be voluntary or obligatory for the full extent of their studies (30.36% and 30.67% respectively). Insignificantly more students are in favor of obligatory P.E. lessons during the first two years of studies (31.30%). Half of the surveyed students (50.16%) did not want to participate in P.E. classes altogether. Approximately one fourth preferred university P.E. classes to be of a recreational nature (26.84%), while a competitive sport form was indicated by only 14.38%.

When we asked students to assess their level of motor fitness nearly 46% of those surveyed (45.95%) felt that it was “very good” and 38.16% – “good”. Much fewer (4.61%) believed that their level of motor fitness was only adequate. Poor physical fitness was indicated by just nine respondents. On the opposite end of the spectrum were 62 students who believed their level of motor fitness to be outstanding (Table 2).

Personal hygiene

From the students questioned, 57.84% felt that there are adequate sanitary conditions at the UWM, while approximately a quarter felt otherwise. The remaining students (17.24%) did not have an opinion on the subject. The highest percentage of students (64.80%) indicated that in order to increase the level of hygiene at the

university, it is necessary to remodel and improve the standards of the existing infrastructure. The development of the university was mentioned by 20.00% of the respondents (Table 3).

Daily hygiene including showering, brushing teeth and cleaning intimate parts of the body was considered to be the most important habit connected with good health and indicated by 89.03% of the respondents. The same and very

low percentages of students (3.06%) considered physical activity and other behaviors to be of importance. Similar and still lower percentages of students (1.93% and 2.09% respectively) indicated proper nutrition and the cleanness and tidiness of apparel as important aspects of good health. The vast majority of those questioned (87.54%) specified only one pro health behavior, with two and three mentioned by only a small percentage (Table 3).

Table 2: Physical activity of participation in secondary school, preferred nature during university studies, and assessment of own level

Number of forms assumed during secondary school											
1		2		3		4		5		Total	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
308	48.73	234	37.03	80	12.66	8	1.27	2	0.32	632	100
Not limited		Periodically Limited				Limited constantly		Total			
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
527	82.34	102	15.94	11	1.72	640				100	
Circumstances under which physical activity was performed										N	%
Academic Sport s Association										1	0.16
None										5	0.78
Society for the Propagation of Physical Culture										13	2.03
Collegiate Sport Club										30	4.69
Other Organisation										37	5.78
School Sport Club (SSC)										123	19.22
Non-school Sports Clubs										127	19.84
Individually, occasionally with family										149	23.28
Obligatory PE Lessons										585	91.41
Preferred nature of PE lessons during university studies											
Obligatory during all study years		Obligatory during first two years		Only voluntary		Completely unnecessary		No opinion		Total	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
196	30.67	200	31.30	194	30.36	16	2.50	33	5.16	639	100
Preferred form of PE lessons during university studies											
Recreation		Sport		I do not want to attend		Hard to say		Total			
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
168	26.84	90	14.38	314	50.16	954	8.63	626		100	
Students' own assessment of their motor fitness level in a scale on 1 - 6											
Level of motor fitness										N	%
1 (very poor)										0	0.00
2 (poor)										9	1.43
3 (satisfactory)										29	4.61
4 (good)										240	38.16
5 (very good)										289	45.95
6 (outstanding)										62	9.86
Total										629	100

Table 3: Students' opinions on sanitary conditions at UWM and on most important pro-health activities

Are the sanitary conditions at UWM satisfactory?									
Yes		No		I do not know		Total			
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
369	57.84	159	24.92	110	17.24	638		638	100
How to improve it?									
Supply cleaning products						9		9	7.20
Improve room cleanness						10		10	8.00
University development – new facilities						25		25	20.00
Repairs: increasing the standard of existing buildings						81		81	64.80
Total						125		125	100
Most important pro-health activities according to students									
Other						10		10	1.48
Cleaning and disinfection of rooms/flats						15		15	2.22
Nutrition						25		25	3.70
Proper motor fitness						25		25	3.70
Cleanliness and tidiness of apparel						27		27	4.00
Everyday body hygiene						572		572	78.18
Total*						674		674	100
Number of pro-health activities indicated by students									
1 activity		2 activities		3 activities		4 activities		Total	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
541	87.54	66	10.68	11	1.78	0	0.00	618	100

Explanations: * - the examined persons could give several answers

Nutrition & tobacco/alcohol use

Table 4 presents the behaviors and attitudes of students regarding nutrition and tobacco/alcohol use. The majority of respondents felt that their present diet has a positive influence on their current and future health (55.29% and 60.99% respectively). However, a significant portion of respondents also admitted that their dietary habits negatively affect or will affect them (29.49% - now, 29.30% in the future). Quite a significant portion of students believed that nutrition does not influence their current health (15.22%). Most of the students questioned (70.13%) expressed willingness to improve their dietary habits, with the remaining 31.28% feeling otherwise.

The large majority of questioned 1st year students (69.69%) admitted to sporadically consuming alcohol. Only 3.08% denied drinking alcohol altogether. Relatively high percentages admitted that they drank alcohol once a month, once a week, or as often as every day (8.59%,

10.70%, and 7.94% respectively). Over three quarters of students (78.61%) declared drinking only one type of alcohol, and 13.61% - drank two. A wider assortment of alcohol consumed was noted by an insignificant number of respondents. Beer was the most popular alcoholic beverages (60.73%), while similar percentages of students reported drinking wine (11.03%) and vodka (14.30%). Less than ten percent (7.39%) reported consuming other forms of alcohol. Nearly all of the students (88.59%) believed that alcohol should be readily available on campus and only 3.96% opposed this. Among the questioned men, 7.45% did not have an opinion on the matter (Table 4).

Although most students (57.10%) were completely against smoking, 21.77% felt it was acceptable in certain situations. Approximately 10% of the respondents believed that smoking helps to relieve stress and slightly more than a half percent – that it helps socialize. Over 10% (10.41%) felt there were other advantages to smoking. Most students who smoked (48.89%)

wanted to quit, but a significant percentage (33.82%) did not feel a need to do so. The

remainder of smokers did not have a clear opinion on the issue.

Table 4. Students' opinions and habits regarding nutrition, alcohol consumption and smoking

Students' opinions on current influence of nutrition											
Positive		Negative		Lack of influence		Total					
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
345	55.29	184	29.49	95	15.22	624				100	
Students' opinions on future influence of nutrition											
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
383	60.99	184	29.30	61	9.71	628				100	
Students' willingness to change eating habits											
Yes		No		No opinion		Total					
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
446	70.13	190	31.28	0	0	636				100	
Alcohol consumption preferred by students											
I do not drink		Sporadically		Once a month		Once a week		Every day		Total	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
19	3.08	430	69.69	53	8.59	66	10.70	49	7.94	617	100
Number of types of alcohol consumed by students											
1		2		3		4		5		Total	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
485	78.61	84	13.61	34	5.51	11	1.78	3	0.49	617	100
Types of alcohol most frequently consumed										N	%
I do not drink at all										26	3.15
Cognac										28	3.39
Other										61	7.39
Wine										91	11.03
Vodka										118	14.30
Beer										501	60.73
Total*										825	100
Students' opinion whether alcohol should be allowed on campus											
Yes		No		No opinion		Total					
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
559	88.59	25	3.96	47	7.45	631				100	
Students' opinions on smoking										N	%
Smoking helps me to meet people										54	7.84
Smoking helps me to relieve nerve tension										114	16.54
I sometimes smoke in social situations										159	23.07
I am in favour of total abstaining from cigarettes completely										362	52.55
Total										689	100
Do you want to give up smoking?											
Yes		No		No opinion		Total					
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
163	48.89	122	33.82	42	17.27	327				100	

Explanations: * - the examined persons could give several answers

Stress

The opinions of students regarding stress are presented in table 4. Nearly 70% of the students (69.56%) agreed that it is impossible to avoid stressful situations while at university. Just over 13% of the respondents (13.25%) were very worried about stress and 15.14% felt that they would be able to cope with it well. The majority of students (72.2%) indicated that they were familiar with only one method of dealing with

stress. Two methods were mentioned by 19.2% of respondents. Significantly fewer indicated three methods (7.26%), with four, five, and six indicated by only a handful of students (Table 5). Sport was most often specified as a means of dealing with stress (18.52%), followed by meeting with friends (15.68%). More than 10% of students did not think about stress (10.62%) while almost 9% claimed that stress could be reduced by using substances such as alcohol, cigarettes, and/or drugs (8.77%).

Table 5: Students' opinions on stressful situations encountered during studies and familiar methods of coping with stress

Opinions on stressful situations														N	%
I cannot answer univocally														13	2.05
I am very concerned about of stressful situations														84	13.25
Stressful situations are encountered but I am able to cope with them														96	15.14
I consider stressful situations to be unavoidable														441	69.56
Total														634	100
Number of indicated methods of coping with stress															
1		2		3		4		5		6		Total			
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
458	72.24	122	19.24	46	7.26	6	0.95	2	0.32	0	0.00	634	100		
Methods														N	%
Talking to a psychologist														4	0.49
Sauna														5	0.62
Proper nutrition														7	0.86
Breathing exercises														8	0.99
Taking pills/medication														8	0.99
Sweets														9	1.11
Relaxation methods														12	1.48
Massage														15	1.85
Watching TV														16	1.98
Sleeping														17	2.10
Talking with a friend														20	2.47
Relaxing														23	2.84
I do not know														25	3.09
Sex														27	3.33
Walking														51	6.30
Hobby														32	3.95
Other														33	4.07
Listening to music														64	7.90
Alcohol, nicotine and drug use														71	8.77
I do not think about stress														86	10.62
Meeting friends														127	15.68
Doing sports														150	18.52
Total*														810	100

Explanations: * - the examined persons could give several answers

Knowledge regarding health care

First year university students were very interested in gaining knowledge on the following topics: sexuality (48.78%), social skills and manners (46.67%), and first aid (41.71%). The spread and prevention of civilization diseases (49.92%) and biorhythms (49.08%) were shown

to invoke the partial interest of the surveyed students. On the other hand, many members of our study group did not have any interest in gaining knowledge on topics such as: problems with pregnancy (76.40%), drug use and its consequences (48.94%), and physical activity programs and guidelines (47.93%) (Table 6).

Table 6: Knowledge on public health gained in voluntary lessons

Subjects	I am interested in the following subjects							
	Fully		Partly		Not at all		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Tiredness & fatigue	150	24.92	174	28.90	278	46.18	602	100
First aid	264	41.71	289	45.66	80	12.64	633	100
Sexuality	300	48.78	259	42.11	56	9.11	615	100
Social skills	287	46.67	225	36.59	103	16.75	615	100
Daily rhythm of work and rest	223	37.23	294	49.08	82	13.69	599	100
Civilization diseases	139	22.46	309	49.92	171	27.63	619	100
Psychological and social health hazards	193	31.38	270	43.90	152	24.72	615	100
Ethics and culture of sexual life	221	34.69	237	37.21	179	28.10	637	100
Methods of reducing and coping with stress	259	40.60	235	36.83	144	22.57	638	100
Study skills	269	44.24	170	27.96	169	27.80	608	100
Proper nutrition	236	37.64	288	45.93	103	16.43	627	100
Venereal diseases and methods of protection against them	198	32.57	278	45.72	132	21.71	608	100
Monitoring and self-assessment of physical fitness	185	29.51	267	42.58	175	27.91	627	100
Personal hygiene and lifestyle	81	12.92	247	39.39	299	47.69	627	100
Marital maturity	110	18.03	243	39.84	257	42.13	610	100
Nicotine use and its consequences	145	23.50	183	29.66	289	46.84	617	100
Physical activity programmes	72	11.94	242	40.13	289	47.93	603	100
Prevention against colds and building resistance	190	31.15	242	39.67	178	29.18	610	100
Motherhood and fatherhood –family planning	162	26.21	209	33.82	247	39.97	618	100
Alcoholism, causes and consequences	202	32.22	275	43.86	150	23.92	627	100
Purpose and effectiveness of everyday physical culture	89	14.02	264	41.57	282	44.41	635	100
Differences in male and female health behaviours	98	15.71	240	38.46	286	45.83	624	100
Problems with pregnancy and its protection	59	10.02	80	13.58	450	76.40	589	100
Drug use	140	22.84	173	28.22	300	48.94	613	100

Discussion

The Our studies clearly indicate that physical activity is not a priority among 1st year university students because few of them felt that P.E. lessons should be obligatory throughout their university education and many deemed them as completely unnecessary. Furthermore, those students who did feel it was important to attend P.E. lessons at university wished to do so at a

recreational rather than sports level, which reflects their lack of interest in participating in sports. The unwillingness of students to take part in various forms of physical activity (19, 20) probably dates back to their earlier years when many behavioral and physiological changes occur (21). During this period adolescents become focused on other matters which take priority over physical activity (e.g., the opposite sex, appearance, pop culture etc.), and tend to

lose interest in sport if not encouraged by positive role models (22). This is supported by the results of our survey which revealed that the vast majority of students attended only obligatory P.E. lessons and limited themselves to only one or two forms of physical activity. Sports participation in the European Union and its member states still depends on social status, age, gender, income, and education level (2). For example, children from well-off families tend to be more engaged in sports as their parents can afford to pay coaches, cover travel expenses etc (23). One possible reason as to why Polish students do not often participate in sports and recreation is that they often undertake additional work and studies, and therefore do not have sufficient free time or finances.

Despite the above, students questioned in our survey tended to have a rather high opinion of themselves in terms of physical fitness. However, this is not a good indication of the student's actual physical condition, as it is contradicted by their answers regarding the forms of physical activity (or rather the lack of) that they undertook. Moreover, this social group is well known for highlighting attributes which they may not even possess as a result of peer pressure and the need to impress others (10, 11).

It is surprising, that nearly all students considered everyday hygiene to be the most important pro-health activity, when choosing from other key factors such as nutrition and physical fitness. It is a well known fact that a proper diet and an adequate level of physical fitness are crucial elements of good health but do not seem to be regarded as such by university youth (8, 24, 25). Although it is commonly agreed that university students don't pay much attention to proper nutrition and are characterized by rather negative eating habits (26) most of our respondents felt that the current influence of their nutrition was positive and even more of them believed it would continue to be positive in the future.

Information obtained from our research regarding university students' drinking habits is very worrying. Although we cannot expect

students to completely abstain from drinking alcohol (only about 3% of our respondents confirmed doing so) the fact that a significant percentage of them drink habitually and even every day must be brought to attention. People who drink alcohol more than once or twice a week may be alcoholics or run the risk of becoming ones in the future. A similar phenomenon has been observed in countries such as the United States, where binge drinking was found to occur frequently among American university students (27). Europe is not exception to this. In Ireland, the percentage of men who declared drinking alcohol above the weekly recommended units was 52.21% (28). According to a study conducted by Stock et al. (15) many men from Germany (30%), Poland (28%), and Lithuania (26%), were found to have a problem with drinking. Another indicator that alcohol has taken on an important role in university students' lives is that nearly all questioned men approved of selling alcohol on campus.

As far as smoking is considered, nearly half of 1st year university male students smoke, although not necessarily regularly. Almost 50% of smokers would like to give up this harmful habit but approximately one third would not, with another 17% not having any opinion on the subject. On the contrary, studies conducted of seven universities throughout the United Kingdom revealed that 71% of students had never smoked (29), which is slightly higher than in the U.S., where 65% of university students reported not having direct contact with cigarettes (30). A similar tendency was observed in other European countries such as Spain, Germany, and Lithuania, where approximately three quarters of university students were non-smokers or only smoked on a few particular occasions (31). It is not surprising that nearly 17% of students in our studies reported that smoking cigarettes relieves mental tension. A similar finding was observed in a study on Australian students (32).

University life is full of stressful situations. Young adults are forced to make many life-altering decisions, which often cause them to be overly stressed (33). Such situations are usually more extreme during exam sessions, as well as

routine tests. This was confirmed by our studies in which over 13% of surveyed men feared such situations. In order to develop a resistance to stress, appropriate exercises and techniques are found to be very helpful and should be included in the university study curriculum (34). It should however be noted that it is the students themselves who should express the desire to participate in such programs. Our studies showed that 1st year university students were in fact interested in gaining knowledge on this topic. Other even more popular topics included sexuality, improving social skills, study skills and mental health, and first aid.

On the other hand, topics such as: problems with pregnancy, consequences of drug use and physical activity programs were not found to grab the attention of members of our study group. Since students were not interested in gaining knowledge on numerous topics, many of which are essential to good health, it would appear that UWM students do not take their health seriously. A similar and worrisome trend was also observed among Malaysian and Australian students of medicine, who were not found to possess adequate knowledge regarding human sexual and reproductive health (35).

Conclusion

The habits of 1st year university male students do not promote a healthy life. The overwhelming majority of them cannot be considered to have led a physical activity lifestyle during secondary school and at the beginning of their university studies, and many of them did not even express an interest in doing so in the foreseeable future. Nearly all students consume alcohol and a significant percentage of them drink habitually, as often as every day. Nearly half of the surveyed students smoke cigarettes, although not necessarily regularly. The majority of students considered stressful situations to be unavoidable and were not able to indicate more than one method of coping with stress. They did, however, express an interest in gaining knowledge on this subject. On the whole, most pro-health topics did not trigger the interest of 1st year male university students. The studies should

be continued in further years to see if any changes in the habits and attitudes of students have taken place, determine the direction of these changes, and develop a strategy that would facilitate improvement in the years to come.

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