

## LIFE HABITS OF STUDENT POPULATION AS A FACTOR IN ORIENTATION TO THE UNIVERSITY SPORTS

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### Abstract

Previous studies in our country which included the student population did not put significant emphasis to identification of young people habits that can be relevant to their engagement in physical exercise activities, especially within the universities. The research that has been realized on Educons University, as cross-sectional study applying Survey method, was specifically aimed to identify specific habits of students that may have impact on commitment to the exercise of physical activity and sport within the university. The sample in this research is consisted of 430 students from Educons University, Sremska Kamenica, Serbia, including both sexes.

**Key words:** life habits, students, university sports

### Introduction

Life habits of modern people, especially in adult period, are mostly determined by some of the basis, set in man's previous development phases. Positive lifestyle habits, especially those that are related to health, such as proper nutrition, regular exercise, avoiding tobacco and alcohol etc. are acquired over lifetime period where childhood and early adolescence may be considered as the most important period of their formation. There are numerous of factors that may have strong impact on their formation, though crucial importance should be attributed to parent role models and peer group. In 1946 World Health Organization (WHO) has defined health as the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being which excludes the opinion that health can be considered as the absence of disease. However, the concept of lifestyle is a lot wider than the health aspect and it's strongly related to the people habits. Back in the 1966, J. Electon defined the quality of life as the harmony within man, and the harmony between man and environment. This emphasizes the relationship of the individual with the environment (functional status of human and environmental conditions), but it does not put limits to well-being and satisfaction in the man. Still, only an individual can determine the quality of life, by personal meaning, because it is a subjective term that has no universal meaning. As well, it must be taken into consideration that there are many factors that can impair quality of life, and one of them is the lack of physical activity. Physical activity represents all kind of movement and activity that can increase energy consumption, which is much different and above the consumption of energy in the idle man's body. This type of activity usually involves everyday activities such as walking, cycling, climbing stairs, work at home, etc. On the other hand, exercise is a planned and purposeful physical activity with the primary objective to promote health and physical shape.

Typical forms of this type of physical activity are brisk walking, cycling, aerobics and active hobbies such as gardening or some of the competitive sports. In contrast to physical activity and exercise, which represent behavioral processes, physical condition or shape is the sum of attributes (example: strength or stamina) that determine the capacity to perform physical activity. Physical shape is largely contributed with the level of physical activity so various exercise programs may be formed and completed in order to improve certain physical shape attributes (Ostojic and Associates, 2009). Therefore, physical activity is any form of body movement that increases energy consumption including exercises, training and competition, intensive professional work, housework and other activities that require some physical exertion. Previous studies in our country, which has been targeting student population, were not including identification of young people habits that may be relevant to their engagement in physical exercise activities, especially within the universities. However there are research studies that include forms of youth leisure time (Stepanovic and Associates, 2009) and they detected the basic characteristics of some habits that are related to sports such as following sports matches and getting sports information through various media, visiting sports events and relatively pronouncing preference for involvement in sports. Foreign authors (Akvatias, 2000.; Douson and Associates, 2004.; Orford and Associates, 2004.) indicate a poor position of healthy habits in young people lifestyle and great tendency to risky behaviors that have a negative impact on health. Taking into account characteristics of the student lifestyle, the socio-cultural environment which surrounds young people and the fact that Educons University has not conducted any research on this topic, we thought it was important to identify some key indicators that could confirm the presence of certain habits that can affect the commitment of students to participate in sports activities at the university.

## Objective and methods

The research was conducted within a broader research project at the Educons University and as a cross-sectional study with the application of Survey method, was aiming, among other things, to identify those lifestyle habits of students that can have an impact on commitment to the exercise and physical activity in sport within the University. The sample consisted of 430 students from the Educons University, Sremska Kamenica. Sex structure of the sample population included 200 male respondents (46.5%) and 230 women (53.5%). Age characteristics of the segment were divided by five sub sample: 18-20 years (11.9%), 21-25 years (45.8%), 26-30 years (15.1%), 31-35 years (14%) and over 35 years (13.3%). As a research instrument, especially designed questionnaire was applied. In the section related to the assessment of respondents life habits the main indicators are positioned in the following descriptions of activities: smoking, consumption of narcotics, alcohol consumption, regular eating, sleeping and doing sports and other recreational activity. Statistical analysis is performed by using methods of descriptive and comparative statistics. Comparative statistics area gave mostly discriminate procedures, including contingency analysis ( $X^2$ -test) mostly because the empirical material is arranged as a nominal variable scale. By using cross-tabulation, data obtained are arranged and displayed in the form of contingency tables of dimensions.

## Results and discussion

At the very beginning of the analysis of the research results it must be one more time emphasized that the World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely as the absence of disease. For this reason, it is necessary to take into account a number of factors that directly impact on health of people, both at the individual level (age, gender, genetic structure, habits, etc.), and society as a whole. Especially in this context, so-called "bad habits" are emphasized considering smoking, excessive and inadequate nutrition, alcohol consumption, use of narcotics, stress, and lack of physical activity. World Health Organization set some priorities in the current health policy called "Health for all in the 21st century" where is, among other things, the following: increased responsibility for the health of society - the avoidance of harmful effects on health of individuals, over proper care for healthy environment, to limit production of items that harm health. Previous research in this area clearly indicates a relation between social components and specific lifestyle habits (WHO, 2005). The type of research has caused the observation of certain characteristics of respondents, primarily in terms of their individual lifestyles, including the active contact with some form of sports and recreational activities. Analysis of results showed that a third of respondents (34.4%) claim to do some form of sports and/or

sports and recreational activities for at least three times a week, which can be considered as regular physical exercise. However, it is evident that the aspect of sexual differentiation of the sample cannot speak of a favorable structure and representation of regular physical exercise among female students (7.2%), due to the significantly smaller number of those who voted for this type of activity among the female population. On the other hand, observing the respondents who "occasionally" practice some form of physical exercise (39.5%) and those who do not engage in physical exercise (26%), we can state a condition that has a disturbing character. In other words, it is possible to conclude that the majority of respondents in their everyday life activities do not give appropriate attention to physical exercise (sports) as part of their lifestyle, regardless of knowledge of its positive impact on personal health status (65.5%). Observational variable some of the statistically significant differences ( $n < .050$ ;  $\chi^2 = 96,128$ ; sig. = ,000) and there is particularly noted that among physically inactive respondents are mostly women (46.2%), while in men this percent is much lower (19.3%). Such conclusions in observed categories are consistent with the World Health Organization, which clearly indicates that the main feature of modern times, in which young people live, is a deficit of physical activity in all social classes, where student population is also not exempt from these trends. Lifestyle at the beginning of the twenty first century is determined with great lack of movement and physical activity, and such has a direct impact on the health status of young people. However, opinions about the usefulness of organizing sports and recreational activities at the university indicate that majority of respondents have a positive attitude to this idea (91.6%). In terms of sex differentiation in this indicator, there was no significant difference among male and female respondents, so it can be concluded that there is a general support for the idea of intensifying the reaffirmation of sports at the university (Table 1). Therefore, such (positive) attitude about the usefulness of physical exercise should not be ignored, since it can be a very stable base for the promotion and realization of sports ideas given by the Educons University management.

Table 1 – The opinion of the respondents on the benefits of sport at the University

Organization of sports and recreative activities at the University would be useful	Gender		Total
	M	F	
Yes	181 42,1%	213 49,5%	394 91,6%
Not sure	14 3,3%	17 4,0%	31 7,2%
No	5 1,2%	0 ,0%	5 1,2%
$\Sigma$	200 46,5%	230 53,5%	430 100,0%

$$\chi^2 = 5,825$$

$$\text{Sig.} = ,054$$

Adoption of the student lifestyle in young people is a kind of turnover in life activities so due to intense transition from the secondary school environment, regular habits can change dramatically. This may be a critical period where young people can adopt either healthy or unhealthy habits, especially because in this particular age they are at the peak of their health status (in terms of morbidity and mortality) and neglect of health promotion and healthy lifestyle can create conditions for the occurrence of bad habits, and thus start compromising their health. During their studying, young people can be in different situations that are arising from brand new social environment which consequently directs them to the full acceptance of life of adults and responsible people. When it comes to smoking, as one of the bad and harmful habits, the survey showed that most respondents regularly use tobacco or smoking intensely (50.5%). It is particularly notable that the present consumption of cigarettes is more the case of female students (32.6%) than male students (17.9%). Considering the age, survey showed that the highest percentage of smokers (17.8%) is between 21-25 years old (Table 2,2a). Given the well known consequences of tobacco use, this can be seen as a very worrying situation. Tobacco smoke contains over 4000 different chemical compounds among which is, the best known, nicotine (which is addictive). It breaks down relatively quickly in our body so during one day, person who is a smoker can consume large quantities of nicotine without any signs of poisoning (with a smoked cigarette is absorbed from 1.5 to 2.5 mg nicotine). The consequences of tobacco use, among other things, are reflected in an increased risk of developing heart disease and vascular problems (especially heart attack, stroke and diseases of the peripheral circulation). Long term cigarette use doubles the risk of death from heart and vascular disease, and 30% to 40% of all deaths from coronary heart disease are associated with smoking. The mechanism of nicotine action is primarily manifested through the work of the adrenal gland that releases adrenaline and noradrenalin, leading to an increase in heart rate, squeezing the small blood vessels and increase blood pressure. In addition to these effects, tobacco smoke constituents which are in lung area are crossing into the bloodstream, causing damage to cells in blood vessels.

Table 2 – The frequency of consumption of cigarettes

Gender	DAILY CIGARETTE SMOKING				Total
	Up to 10	10-20	> 20	0	
M	18	30	29	123	200
	4,2%	7,0%	6,7%	28,6%	46,5%
F	50	82	8	90	230
	11,6%	19,1%	1,9%	20,9%	53,5%
Total:	68	112	37	213	430
	15,8%	26,0%	8,6%	49,5%	100,0%

$\chi^2 = 56,463$  Sig. = ,000

Table 2a – The frequency of consumption of cigarettes

Age	DAILY CIGARETTE SMOKING				Total
	Up to 10	10 to 20	> 20	0	
18-20 years	10 2,3%	4 ,9%	9 2,1%	28 6,5%	51 11,9%
21-25 years	26 6,0%	45 10,5%	10 2,3%	116 27,0%	197 45,8%
26-30 years	15 3,5%	17 4,0%	10 2,3%	23 5,3%	65 15,1%
31-35 years	8 1,9%	35 8,1%	4 ,9%	13 3,0%	60 14,0%
over 35 years	9 2,1%	11 2,6%	4 ,9%	33 7,7%	57 13,3%
Total	68 15,8%	112 26,0%	37 8,6%	213 49,5%	430 100,0%

$\chi^2 = 61,556$  Sig. = ,000

Table 3 – The consumption of alcohol

Gender	ALCOHOL COMNSUMPTION			Total
	regularly	occasionally	never	
M	38	121	41	200
	8,8%	28,1%	9,5%	46,5%
F	6	179	45	230
	1,4%	41,6%	10,5%	53,5%
Total	44	300	86	430
	10,2%	69,8%	20,0%	100,0%

$\chi^2 = 35,322$  Sig. = ,000

AGE	ALCOHOL COMNSUMPTION			Total
	regularly	occasionally	never	
18-20 years	14	32	5	51
	3,3%	7,4%	1,2%	11,9%
21-25 years	20	145	32	197
	4,7%	33,7%	7,4%	45,8%
26-30 years	10	42	13	65
	2,3%	9,8%	3,0%	15,1%
31-35 years	0	39	21	60
	,0%	9,1%	4,9%	14,0%
over 35 years	0	42	15	57
	,0%	9,8%	3,5%	13,3%
Total	44	300	86	430
	10,2%	69,8%	20,0%	100,0%

$\chi^2 = 48,124$  Sig. = ,000

Alcohol consumption as one of the indicators of the research also showed a trend toward poor living habits. In this case it turned out that alcohol is present in respondent's lives. Although often alcohol consumption is not strongly present among surveyed students (10.2%), it may be relevant that it occasionally appears in regular life activities with most respondents (69.8%). It is also evident that there is a great number of female students who occasionally consume alcohol (43%), and this trend is observed mostly in age group 21-25 years (Table 3). Modern science clearly specifies that one of the most relevant factors of influence on health among men is regular, healthy and balanced nutrition as well as the enough hour of sleep during the day. The consequences of improper and irregular nutrition are already familiar and along with the lack of physical activity and stress these factors are detected as so called *morbid trio factors* that can be harmful to human health. Today, young people are particularly exposed to such trends. One of the main causes of extremely large number of various diseases is, above all, inadequate nutrition and besides it, the most influential are the following: obesity, diabetes, hypertension, atherosclerosis, heart attacks, strokes, various types of allergies, anemia, degenerative diseases, etc. On the other hand, sleeping, as a natural process of recovery characterized by convalescence, or lack of activity of almost all muscles that are moved by human's will, represents higher anabolic condition which recovers human's nervous and immune system, regenerate muscles and refreshes the central nervous system. Therefore, in order to develop good and healthy life habits, it is essential to adopt appropriate rhythm of night sleep (minimum 6 hours).

In this context, research has showed that respondents, despite all presented data, have very bad life habits. In terms of regular nutrition which indicates that breakfast is very important meal, and the pre condition for successful day, our results pointed that majority of students (56.2%) has breakfast only occasionally or doesn't have breakfast at all. In addition to this, research has indicated that 38,6% of respondents eat only two times a day. It is interesting to note that in terms of sex criteria there were no significant differences between male and female students which indicates that this is a general tendency in youth's lifestyle. In terms of age differentiation in this indicator is observed that the age of 21 to 25 years has a pronounced tendency to bad habits. (Table 4, 4a)

Table 4 -Nutritional habits

Gender	BREAKFAST			Total
	regularly	occasionally	never	
M	82	83	35	200
	19,1%	19,3%	8,1%	46,5%
F	106	75	49	230
	24,7%	17,4%	11,4%	53,5%
TOTAL	188	158	84	430
	43,7%	36,7%	19,5%	100,0%

Gender	BREAKFAST			Total
	regularly	occasionally	never	
M	82	83	35	200
	19,1%	19,3%	8,1%	46,5%
F	106	75	49	230
	24,7%	17,4%	11,4%	53,5%
TOTAL	188	158	84	430
	43,7%	36,7%	19,5%	100,0%
$\chi^2 = 3,727$ Sig.= ,155				

Gender	DAILY MEALS			Total
	2	3	4 -5	
M	45	122	33	200
	10,5%	28,4%	7,7%	46,5%
F	121	88	21	230
	28,1%	20,5%	4,9%	53,5%
Total	166	210	54	430
	38,6%	48,8%	12,6%	100,0%
$\chi^2 = 42,249$ Sig.= ,000				

Table 4a - Nutritional habits

AGE	BREAKFAST			Total
	regularly	occasionally	never	
18-20 years	18	21	12	51
	4,2%	4,9%	2,8%	11,9%
21-25 years	102	65	30	197
	23,7%	15,1%	7,0%	45,8%
26-30 years	19	34	12	65
	4,4%	7,9%	2,8%	15,1%
31-35 years	13	25	22	60
	3,0%	5,8%	5,1%	14,0%
over 35 years	36	13	8	57
	8,4%	3,0%	1,9%	13,3%
Total	188	158	84	430
	43,7%	36,7%	19,5%	100,0%
AGE	DAILY MEALS			Total
	2	3	4-5	
18-20 years	28	9	14	51
	6,5%	2,1%	3,3%	11,9%
21-25 years	71	101	25	197
	16,5%	23,5%	5,8%	45,8%
26-30 years	23	33	9	65
	5,3%	7,7%	2,1%	15,1%
31-35 years	27	33	0	60
	6,3%	7,7%	,0%	14,0%
over 35 years	17	34	6	57
	4,0%	7,9%	1,4%	13,3%
Total	166	210	54	430
	38,6%	48,8%	12,6%	100,0%

As for the regular night sleep, it has been identified that almost half of respondents regularly goes to sleep after midnight (44.2%). If add to this group those who go to sleep after 11 p.m. (40%) it can be concluded that more than 2/3 of respondents developed their lifestyle rhythm in accordance with the so called "exchanging day for night" lifestyle trend. In any case, such phenomenon is concerning.

It was noted that this indicator is more typical for man (24%) and in age criteria, most critical group is 21-25 years old (41.8%). In accordance with the previously detected opinions of respondents about the usefulness of introducing some form of sport activity at the university (Table 1), analyses were possible through question "If your university would provide conditions for sports and recreational activities, would you be actively involved?" The answers showed that the largest number of students would be actively involved (63.5%) which is significant indicator. If we count the respondents that do not explicitly declare for this type of activity but they do not reject it as well (maybe – 32.1%), we can talk about the significant number of potential sports consumers at Educons University. Statistically important differences ( $p < .050$ ) were determined in the context of gender (sex) analysis in sub sample, which is manifested the most in the category of the group that declares as "maybe". The distribution in such case is significantly present in female students (22.6%). Also, larger number of male respondents (34.7%) is in category of those who are clearly positive about sports activities at the university (Table 5).

Table 5 - Potentially active participation in sports and recreational activities at the University

Gender	Practice of sports and recreational activities at the University			Total
	Yes	Maybe	No	
M	149	41	10	200
	34,7%	9,5%	2,3%	46,5%
F	124	97	9	230
	28,8%	22,6%	2,1%	53,5%
Σ	273	138	19	430
	63,5%	32,1%	4,4%	100,0%
$\chi^2=23,644$ Sig.= ,000				

In the context of the interpretation of results of research, it is desirable to, once again, draw attention, to the impact of young people lifestyle habits. In addition to this we should point out that health aspect of academic medicine is defined as a biological, psychological, social and spiritual well-being of a man. It is a condition in which human beings are functioning on optimal level of integration of elements such as body, mind and soul. This means that a healthy man is the one that lives in happiness, health and wholeness, or as an individual that sees life as fulfillment of meaning and purpose. If we take a brief look at the average way of living among young people, we can notice that the pervious determinants may be an issue. The average young person today is characterized by: less walking; generally not engaged in physical activities (sports, recreation); lead sedentary lifestyle; study at university in average 6-8 years (if study at all); most of the time is without a job (even after graduation) and waits for employment in average 7-10 years; lives with parents; gets married pretty late (30 years average); spends free time in bars, at parties and sending SMS form a mobile phone; goes to night sleep after midnight and wakes up in late morning, etc.

Recent research (Group of Authors, 2007) show that less than 1/3 of young people (18-27 years old) are regularly engaged to physical activity (sports or recreational activities) and from 1998, Physical Education as the subject in universities all over Serbia, no longer exists. The promotion of sports facilities should be curtail activity against young people (and people in general) passive attitude towards recreation and sports, developed bad habits and in order to secure prevention of various diseases (diabetes, hypertension, obesity).

### Final remarks

The problem of existence of young people lifestyle habits, is one of the most popular issues when it comes to observation of their working and living activities. This is especially the case among student population. Modern research have shown trend of increase of young people, especially the high school and university students, who have already adopted certain lifestyle habits that may be described as unhealthy. Some "behavior" of young ones can be considered as risk that includes: improper and irregular meals, lack of physical activity, "sitting" lifestyle, smoking, alcohol consumption, use of narcotics, etc. The World Health Organization (WHO) data are warning that each year, about 3 million people die worldwide as a result of a lack of physical activity and that smoking is the second cause of mortality, killing 6 million people, including passive smokers. WHO experts warn of a growing obesity as one of the main problems of modern time, which does not exclude young people. Obesity, as one of the consequences of poor nutrition, can activate various diseases that directly harm health (heart and vascular disease, diabetes, kidney disease, etc.) In addition, excessive alcohol consumption can bring other problems concerning health and social problems. Recently published study in international magazine "Archives of Internal Medicine", shows that unhealthy lifestyle habits can make people look and feel "old" up to 12 years. In addition, the combination of two or more of the four most commonly observed and unhealthy lifestyle habits (smoking, alcohol consumption, poor and irregular nutrition and lack of physical activity) increases the risk of death and disease, primarily thorough the cardiovascular system. Besides that, it was discovered that bad (unhealthy) habits can have a negative impact on sex life (over weight, lack of movement, alcohol and drug consumption, smoking, etc.) and even cause sexual dysfunction in both gender (male or female). Research conducted at the Educons University included 430 respondents in total. Using an anonyms questionnaire, specifically constructed for this particular study, 200 male students and 230 female students of Educons University were surveyed. Detected data give the trend of average student population form Novi Sad or other parts of Vojvodina. Adolescence as a part of maturing and searching for personal identity can certainly leave a mark on the students, which reflects in need and desire to "experiment" and create lifestyle habits, sometimes including certain substances (alcohol

and drugs) that can create addiction. The variables in the research were representing indicators of acquired habits and had a dependency related to: doing sports and recreational activities, cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption, drug use and eating and sleeping habits. The space of independent variables is dimensioned by sex and age of respondents. The analyzed results showed that, in terms of individual life habits, students of Educons University tend to the following: lack of physical activity (65.5%), active tobacco use (50.5%), occasional alcohol consumption (69.8%), regular use of alcohol (10.2%), bad nutrition habits (occasionally or never has breakfast - 56.2%; two meals per day - 38.6%), improper "rhythm" of daily rest (goes to sleep after midnight - 44.2%) and narcotic substances (tried at least once 12.3% of respondents). Therefore, it can be concluded that:

- Respondents are showing high tendency toward bad living habits;
- This particularly includes female students;
- The most critical age group is 21-25 years old students;
- Respondents are recognizing the significance and need for regular physical exercise, but in order to do it, they expect external support;
- Respondents have opinion about active participation in various programs of physical activity (sports and/or sports and recreation) at the university if they would be initiated, developed and organized by the university management.

Judging by the presented results of research, considering the aspect of identification of certain habits among Educons University students and considering their possible influence on individual attitudes towards the idea of introducing sports (physical exercise) at university, it can be concluded that certain lifestyle habits (in these case, the bad ones) are representing significant basis for future change. Research results can be treated as well as adequate support for the general thesis that when it comes to youth education physical activity as whole, especially sports, must represent a significant attributes of building, maintaining and improving student's bio-psycho-social capacity. In this context, the efforts will clearly grade the concept of student's physical activity as a long term project, that will develop and improve life and work quality on Educons University. In addition to this, constant work on university sports reaffirmation should also take into consideration all the ontological and axiological characteristics of sports, that have foundations in familiar ancient Greek ideals (kalokagathia and paideia). Their reinforcement should be affirmed as an important need of modern time, mostly because they represent an important dimension of versatile personality formation to each student, strongly contribute to liberal and social relations in society and preserving health potentials of young people.

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## ŽIVOTNE NAVIKE STUDENATA KAO ČIMBENIK OPREDJELJENJA PREMA SPORTU NA SVEUČILIŠTU

### Sažetak

*Dosadašnja istraživanja u Republici Srbiji, koja su obuhvaćala studentsku populaciju, nisu se u značajnijoj mjeri bavila identifikacijom životnih navika mladih koje mogu biti od značaja za njihovo angažiranje u aktivnostima tjelesnog vježbanja, posebno u okviru sveučilišta. Istraživanje koje je realizirano na Univerzitetu Edukons, kao transverzalna studija i uz primjenu Servej metoda, imalo je za cilj identifikaciju pojedinih životnih navika studenata koje mogu imati utjecaja na opredjeljenja prema bavljenju tjelesnim aktivnostima i sportom u okviru sveučilišta. Uzorak ispitanika činilo je 430 studenata Univerziteta Edukons iz Sremske Kamenice, oba spola.*

**Ključne riječi:** životne navike, studenti, sveučilišni sport

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