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Sport and other motor activities of Warsaw students

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Summary

Study aim: To assess the engagement of students of Warsaw university schools in sports and in recreational motor activities.
Material and methods: A cohort (n = 1100) of students attending B.S. or M.S. courses at 6 university schools in Warsaw were studied by applying questionnaire techniques. The questions pertained to participation in competitive sports and in recreational motor activities throughout the last year.
Results: 8% of all students participated in competitive sports, 5% were members of college athletic clubs. Over 90% of students declared practicing leisure motor activities regularly (53%), seasonally (29%) or occasionally (11%). Most differences were related to the study year, 2nd year students being more active than their 4th year mates.
Conclusions: Higher engagement of 2nd than of 4th year students in motor activities may result from obligatory, curricular physical education activities. Academic communities ought to undertake substantial effort towards shaping continuous health-directed habits of students.

Key words: Competitive sport – Motor activity - Sport for all – Students

Introduction

Popularising sports and the related attitudes and behavioural patterns is an important element of social culture. Because of their future roles in the society, including culture shaping, students ought to assume and cultivate the health-directed lifestyle, motor activities being an essential part of it [1]. An engagement in sport activities during the university studies shapes the attitudes towards motor activities [7,9] and enhances maintaining such habits in the adult age [8].

When talking of engagement in sports, it is understood in Poland as competitive sport [8], i.e. usually a club membership and participation in competitions, while in many European countries also diverse leisure motor activities are called sports [7]. Thus, population statistics contain competitive athletes together with those practicing recreational sports [3,4,14] and in this study both categories were considered. Apart from that, the activities in the "Sport for All" movement [4] were studied and presented. The aim of the study was to assess the engagement of students of Warsaw university schools in competitive sports sport for all and in recreational motor activities.

Material and Methods

Subjects: Two-stage randomising was used to select the cohort of students. First, 6 university schools were selected and then student groups (Year 2 – B.S. students and Year 4 – M.S. students) within those schools. The questionnaires were distributed at the curricular foreign language courses (Year 2) or at other lectures (Year 4), the rate of refusing to participate not exceeding 3 – 5%. A total of 511 male and 589 female students from the following schools consented to participate: Warsaw University (n = 201), Warsaw University of Technology (n = 204), University of Physical Education (n = 124), Warsaw University of Life Sciences (n = 201), Warsaw School of Economics (n = 200) and Military College of Technology (n = 170).

Methodology: The study was conducted from 2006 to 2008, always in March and November, for in those months the temperatures and precipitation were alike and, besides, in those months no increased motor activities could be expected. Standardised questionnaires were applied by direct interviews by specially trained and supervised interviewers. The questions pertained to the kind of sports practiced, numbers of training sessions

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per week, type of club and participation in competitions, types and frequency of leisure motor activities, etc.

Leisure motor activities were defined as recreational, i.e. voluntary, free-time undertaking selected sports like runs, cycling, swimming, gymnastics, etc. Regular activities meant practicing them at least once weekly for at least 5 months in a year. Seasonal activities meant practicing them many times but during summer or winter seasons only, or for e.g. weight losing. Incidental activities meant occasional practicing them 10 – 20 times a year. Sport for all meant regular engagement in competitive or recreational sports.

The SPSS 14 for Windows software was used in data analysis. Log-linear approach [14] was applied to the analysis of frequencies, the level of $p \leq 0.05$ being considered significant.

Results

The results are presented in Tables 1 – 3. Only 8.0% of all students practiced competitive sports; this included those who practiced it once (1.1%), twice (3.5%) and more than twice (3.5%) weekly, the percentage of exercising once weekly being significantly ($p<0.001$) lower from the other ones. No significant differences between genders or study years were noted.

About 16% of all students were members of various sport clubs (Table 1), significantly ($p<0.01$) more men than women (9.6 and 6.3%, respectively), the most popular ones being university clubs and fitness clubs (mainly female students). The so-called other clubs focused on dance, martial sports, horse riding, etc.

Table 1. Percentages of male and female members of sport clubs in the last year

Club type	Men n = 511	Women n = 589
Competitive sports	0.6	0.5
Fitness	0.6*	2.7 º
University	6.8 ^*	2.5 º
Other	1.6	0.5
Total	9.6*	6.3

* Significantly ($p<0.01$) different from the respective value in women; ^ Significantly ($p<0.001$) different from other club types; º Significantly ($p<0.01$) different from competitive sports and other clubs

As many as 92.6% of all students declared participating in leisure motor activities. No significant differences between genders or study years were noted in that respect. However, regular activities were practiced by 41 – 64.7% of students, significantly ($p<0.001$) more among those on the 2nd years of study than on the 4th but the situation was reversed in case of seasonal or occasional activities. Male students significantly ($p<0.001$) more frequently declared practicing leisure activities seasonally than did the female ones (Table 2). Significant differences were shown only for category-related contrasts, not for groups.

Table 2. Percentages of male and female students practicing leisure motor activities

Group	4th year M	4th year F	2nd year M	2nd year F
Total (n)	283	320	228	269
Regular	41.0	45.9	62.3	64.7
Seasonal	38.5	26.3	25.0	24.5
Occasional	13.4	16.9	6.1	6.7
Category	Year of study		Gender	
	4th year	2nd year	M	F
Total (n)	603	497	511	589
Regular	43.6*	63.6	50.5	54.5
Seasonal	32.0*	24.7	32.5*	25.5
Occasional	15.3*	6.4	10.2	12.2

Significantly ($p<0.001$) different from the other category

No significant gender-related differences were noted in percentages of students classified as engaged in the sport for all. On the other hand, the respective percentage of 2nd year students was significantly ($p<0.001$) higher compared with their 4th year mates (63.6 and 43.6%, respectively).

Table 3. Percentages of male and female students engaged in competitive sports

Sport / Gender	Men n = 50	Women n = 39
Fitness	4	38*
Volleyball	14	13
Combat sports	20	8
Other sports	62	41

* Significantly ($p<0.001$) different from the percentage of men

No significant gender-related differences were found in the numbers of those engaged in competitive sports (Table 3). Fitness was an exception as significantly ($p<0.001$) more female than male students practiced it. The category "other sports" included basketball, dance, swimming, sport roller skating, football, tennis and squash.

Table 4. Percentages of male and female students engaged in recreational sports

Sport \ Group	4th year M n = 263	4th year F n = 285	2nd year M n = 213	2nd year F n = 258
Swimming	33.2	48.2*	36.2	49.8*
Cycling	53.4	46.8	51.2	47.9
Fitness	0.4	40.8*	0.5	33.9*
Body building	27.1	10.6*	24.9	9.3*
Skiing	11.5	14.1	12.2	19.1*
Jogging	14.5	13.0	20.2	13.6
Football	22.9	0.4*	36.6º	1.2*
Volleyball	10.3	12.7	19.7º	16.3
Tennis	8.8	4.2*	7.5	7.0
Basketball	14.9	1.1*	18.3	3.1*

Significantly ($p<0.01$) different: * From the respective male group; º From the respective 4th year group

Among the most popular recreational sports were swimming and cycling (men and women), fitness (women), body building and football (men). Significant differences in the declared frequencies were noted between genders or between study years as shown in Table 4.

Discussion

One of the principal objectives of university schools is to prepare students for functioning in the society, and for an active reception of and participation in (broadly speaking) culture, including physical culture. However, when inspecting physical education (PE) curricula of various university schools, obligatory PE courses last one year (Warsaw School of Economics, Warsaw University of Life Sciences) or one to 3 years, depending on the faculty (Warsaw University, Warsaw University of Technology), and for other university schools in Warsaw are only optional. In that latter case, students may participate in optional courses organised by the school or by various student associations.

As follows from the presented data, sport for all, viewed according to the tendencies in the European Union, seems to be a stable element of daily life for about half of the respondents. It should be emphasised that only those students were classified into that category who declared regular participation in competitive and/or recreational sports at least once weekly for at least 5 months in a year. The sport for all category did not include those who declared only seasonal or occasional activities.

The report of the Bridging the East-West Health Gap [5] project contained an alarming information that as many as 70% of Polish subjects practiced no physical activities. The results of other project, Eurobarometer, presented in 2004 [6] and 2010 [7], showed that nearly half of Polish population never engaged in sports or physical exercises and only about one-fourth practice regular (at least once weekly) motor activities. Sport activities were regularly undertaken predominantly by schoolchildren and students but only 36% of them met the recommended amount of motor activities [2].

In view of those reports, the participation of Warsaw students in regular sport activities may be rated as high. It ought to be remembered, however, that students are particularly aware of civilisation-related risks due to their education and prospective social positions. This supports the view that broadening knowledge enhances the health-directed behaviours, including motor activities [4,13].

The fairly high percentage of sport-practicing students, especially the 2nd year ones, might have been due to obligatory or optional PE courses; since that percentage of 4th year students was by about one-third lower, the pressure on maintaining a high level of physical education awareness by university students could be rated as evidently insufficient. That fact has a great impact on the quantitative and qualitative engagement in motor activities in later adulthood, affecting both professional and family functioning.

That socially focused question ought to be seriously considered by university managements, especially in view of their efforts to improve educational functioning, and steps should be taken to improve the accessibility of sport objects, their equipment and attractiveness.

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