

Noémi Keresztes

∴ University of Szeged, Institute of PE and Sport Sciences\*  
∴ tari@jgyfk.u.szeged.hu

## SOCIAL IMAGES ABOUT PHYSICALLY INACTIVE PEERS

*A sportoló fiatalokról alkotott szociális képzetek*

*Socijalne predstave o fizički neaktivnim mladima*

Sedentary, physically inactive lifestyle is a serious public health concern since it poses a risk for premature mortality and morbidity. Considering the university student population is an important aspect of health psychological studies, since in this stage of life health behaviors are influenced by many mediator and moderator factors. Besides socio-demographic backgrounds social influences are found to be determinant factors of sporting behavior. Among social influences social images (prototypes) have significant impact on health behaviors.

My recent study was carried out among Hungarian and foreign students enrolled in the University of Szeged, Hungary (N= 515). Self-administered questionnaires were used for data collecting (age range: 18-31 years; M=21.05 years; S.D.=2.38; 53.1% males, 46.9% females; response rate=79.23%). The questionnaire included items on sociodemographics, sporting habits, activity level of social environment, sport motivation structure, prototypes about physically active and inactive peers, elements of Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Prototypes Willingness Model (PWM), competitive attitude, need to belong, social comparison, social network and social support; however, in this study focus was on social images (prototypes) about physically inactive peers.

After analyzing the obtained data, the results concluded that the level of leisure time physical activity among university students was not satisfactory, sport clubs are key elements of students' activity level, and most of them take part in sport with their friends and classmates. Overall, images about physically inactive peers are quite negative, "lazy", "not sporty" and "body is unimportant" adjectives were popular. I found that there are significant differences in prototype perception regarding gender and activity level. The structure of prototype perception is well separated by personality and appearance factors.

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„University students' social images about physical activity and social influences”  
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To sum up, it can be concluded that health promotion programs should build their strategies on social images.

*Keywords:* social images, university students, physical inactivity, sporting habits, influencing factors

## INTRODUCTION

Sedentary, physically inactive lifestyle is a serious public health concern since an inactive lifestyle is a risk factor for premature mortality and morbidity (MUTRIE–BLAMEY 2004). Regular physical activity is a psychosocial asset in preventing youths' future health problems (SALLIS–OWEN 1999; PIKÓ–KERESZTES 2006). Therefore, secondary and university students are an important target group for health promotion programs. Although there are many health promotion programs targeting young people's activity level, we cannot experience a significant increase in it (VAN SLUIJS ET AL. 2007).

Considering the university student population is an important aspect of health psychological studies, since in this life period health behaviors are influenced by many mediator and moderator factors (UNGER ET AL. 2003). Among university students beside the frequency of health risk behaviors (namely, smoking, alcohol use and binge drinking) physical inactivity also means a risk factor for the quality of life (BRASSAI ET AL. 2006). Previous studies have indicated differences between this population's health behaviors and working youth of the same age (e.g. MORAN ET AL. 2004). Therefore, population studies need to account university students as an important subsample of 18-24 year-old students (JOHNSON ET AL. 2005).

Sociodemographic and socioeconomic variables, have been found to be associated with physical activity and inactivity (PIKÓ–KERESZTES 2008). Studies also usually report gender differences in the amount and level of physical activity (VILHJALMSSON–THORLINDSSON 1998). Besides gender, age is also an important sociodemographic factor influencing young people's physical activity (VILHJALMSSON–KRISTJANSDOTTIR 2003). Social inequalities in health usually appear in health behavior patterns: youth from higher SES engage in more leisure time physical activity than their peers from lower SES groups (PIKÓ–FITZPATRICK 2007). Besides family SES, results also report the important role of family structure (i.e. family intactness) in generating inequalities in health and health behavior (FITZPATRICK 2007). Finally, studies have also reported the importance of residence in leisure time physical activity (KRISTJANSDOTTIR–VILHJALMSSON 2001).

Above sociodemographic background social influences are also found to be determinant factors of sporting behavior (KERESZTES ET AL. 2008). Among social influences social images (prototypes) have significant impact on health

behaviors. The results of previous studies have indicated that adolescents' health-related behaviors are influenced by their social images, or prototypes (e.g. GIBBONS–GERRARD 1997). Prototypes are images that people have of the type of person who engages in particular health-related behaviors (GIBBONS–GERRARD 1995; RIVIS–SHEERAN 2003). Most prototype investigations have focused on health-risk behaviors (TODD–MULAN 2011); the role of prototypes in health-promoting behaviors is a less investigated field of research (KERESZTES ET AL. 2009).

The prototype willingness model (PWM) was developed by Gibbons, Gerard and colleagues (GIBBONS ET AL. 1998; GIBBONS–GERRARD 1995). Besides Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (AJZEN 1991) PWM is also an important model for non-intentional health risk behaviors and thus more comprehensively explain behavior. PWM called as a dual process model that consists of a reasoned pathway and a heuristic pathway (GERRARD ET AL. 2008). The reasoned pathway includes attitude and subjective norms as predictors of intention, which in turn predicts health behaviors (GERRARD ET AL. 2008), whether the heuristic pathway encompasses behaviors that are not necessarily thought out or planned. The heuristic pathway includes two elements; willingness, and prototype perceptions. Willingness is the proximal heuristic determinant of behavior and is considered independent from intentions (GERRARD ET AL. 2008; GIBBONS ET AL. 1998).

Based on earlier studies and my previous experiences on prototypes the main goal of my recent study was to: 1, detect and recognize university students' social images, prototypes on physically inactive peers; 2, define the relation of these prototypes with other variables; 3, recognize the validity of (un/healthy) Eater Prototype Scale regarding physical inactivity; 4, reveal the possible structure of physical inactivity social images.

## SAMPLE AND METHOD

### *Participants and Procedure*

My recent study is „University students' social images about physical activity and social influences” (A2-MZPD-12-0294) a part of my Zoltan Magyary Postdoctoral Fellowship. This research was supported by the European Union and the State of Hungary, co-financed by the European Social Fund in the framework of TÁMOP 4.2.4. A/2-11-1-2012-0001 ‘National Excellence Program’.

Data collecting started in October 2013 and finished in March 2014 among Hungarian and foreign students enrolled in University of Szeged, Hungary. Some of my talented students were involved into my research and data collecting

throughout my tutorial activity. To increase the response rate, I also created the online version of my questionnaire. Of the 650 questionnaires sent out, 515 were returned and analyzed (age range: 18-31 years; M=21.05 years; S.D.=2.38; 53.1% males, 46.9% females; response rate=79.23%). The final sample was 94 foreign students and 421 Hungarian university students (N=515). Most of them were from the Faculty of Education, the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Medicine.

My trained university students and my colleagues distributed the questionnaires to students after briefly explaining the study objectives and providing instructions for completion. The questionnaires were anonymous, and participation was voluntary. Response times ranged from 30 to 40 minutes. The completed questionnaires were collected in sealed envelopes.

### *Measurements*

The self-administered questionnaire included items on socio-demographics, sporting habits, activity level of social environment, sport motivation structure, prototypes about physically active and inactive peers, elements of Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Prototypes Willingness Model (PWM), competitive attitude, need to belong, social comparison, social network and social support. In my recent study I focused on social images (prototypes) about physically inactive peers.

*Physical activity behavior.* The following question was asked about physical activity: “How many times in the past 3 months have you engaged in exercise (physical activity) besides school Physical Education classes (for at least a half hour)?” Response categories were never (1), once or twice (2), two or three times a month (3), once or twice a week (4), and three or more times a week (5) (PIKÓ–KERESZTES 2007). Beside the activity level, I measured organization of sport (1= within school, 2=sport club, 3=with friends, 4=alone), most popular sport (KERESZTES ET AL. 2003) and with whom they go to do sport (1=with friends, 2=classmates, 3=alone, 4=other).

*Prototypes about physically inactive peers.* Participants were asked to evaluate a typical physically inactive peer. The instructions of the prototypes assessment read (GIBBONS–GERRARD 1995, GIBBONS–GERRARD 1997): “When trying to describe someone, people usually use characteristics of that person. For example, if you describe someone of your age who always gets good marks, you might say that this person is smart, serious and bookish. We would like you to think about the image that you have of a Physically Inactive peer of your age for a moment. We are interested in your opinion about the typical Physically Inactive Peer of the same age as you. The typical Physically Inactive peer is: ...”. Participants were then asked to describe the typical Physically

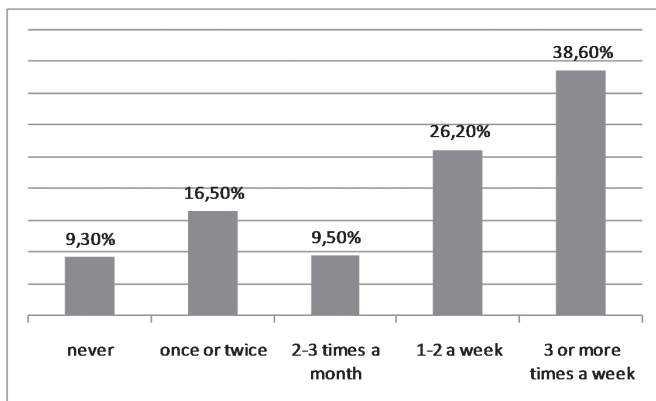
Inactive peer by using 14 bipolar items reflecting personal characteristics and attributes of the target (e.g., insecure/self-confident, undisciplined/disciplined, dissatisfied/satisfied, unkempt/well-groomed, chubby/slim and unpopular/popular). Answers were provided on a seven-point scale. The adjectives used were derived from a study of young people's other preventive health behavior (eater) prototypes (GERRITS ET AL. 2009).

SPSS for MS Windows Release 17.0 program was used in the calculations, with maximum significance level set to 0.05. Beyond descriptive statistics, student t-test and factor analyses were applied to detect the social images on physically peers on a university students sample.

## RESULTS

### *Sporting habits*

First, I present the frequency of physical activity level among university students. As Figure 1 shows 38.6% of the students took part in leisure time physical activity 3 or more times a week and 26.2% once or twice a week. 9.3% of them were inactive in the last 3 months.



*Figure 1. Frequency of sport in lthe last month among University students*

Figure 2 shows the most popular sports in my university student sample. Among team sports: football (13.4%), basketball (8.4%), handball (4.4%) and volleyball (3.6%) were the most popular, while among individual sports: running (9.0%), personal training (6.6%), swimming (6.5%), martial arts (5.3%) and biking (4.5%) were the most frequent.

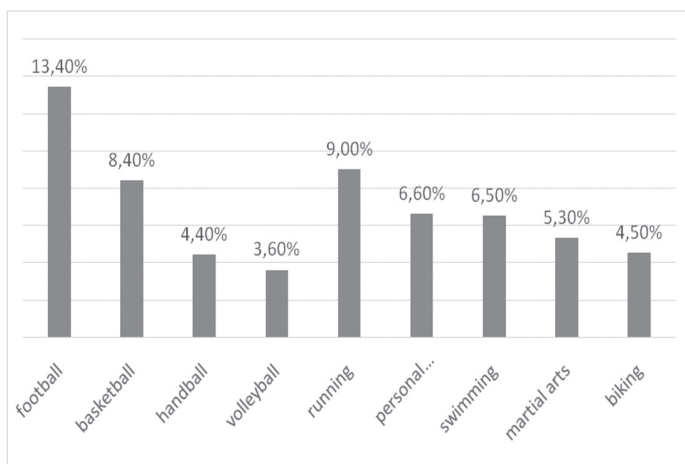


Figure 2. Most popular sports among University students

According to the organization of sport, I found that doing sport in sports clubs was very popular (45.2%), followed by sports with friends without any official background (22.6%) (Figure 3).

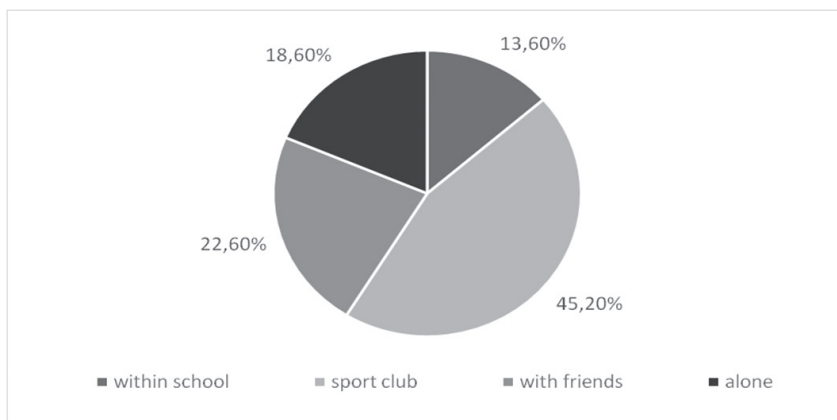


Figure 3. Organization of sport

Figure 4 focuses on the social environment of sport. Most of the respondents (56.5%) took part in leisure time physical activity with their friends. In "other category" (8.2%) team members and club members were frequent.

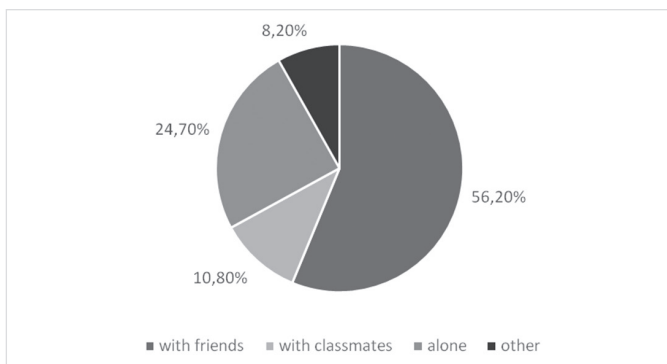


Figure 4. Social environment of sporting habits among University students

### Prototypes on inactive peers

The next figure (Figure 5) demonstrates the frequency of the 14 bipolar items scale regarding physically inactive peers. 45.6% of them thought that they are "irresponsible"; 60.4% "lazy"; 40.8% "sloppy"; 36.4% "undisciplined"; 40.7% "insecure"; 36.1% "focused on the present"; 17.5% "foolish"; 62.7% "not sporty"; 43% "chubby"; 35.9% "dissatisfied"; 16.5% "unkempt"; 33.5% "thinks body is unimportant"; 30.7% "unattractive" and 34.4% "unpopular".

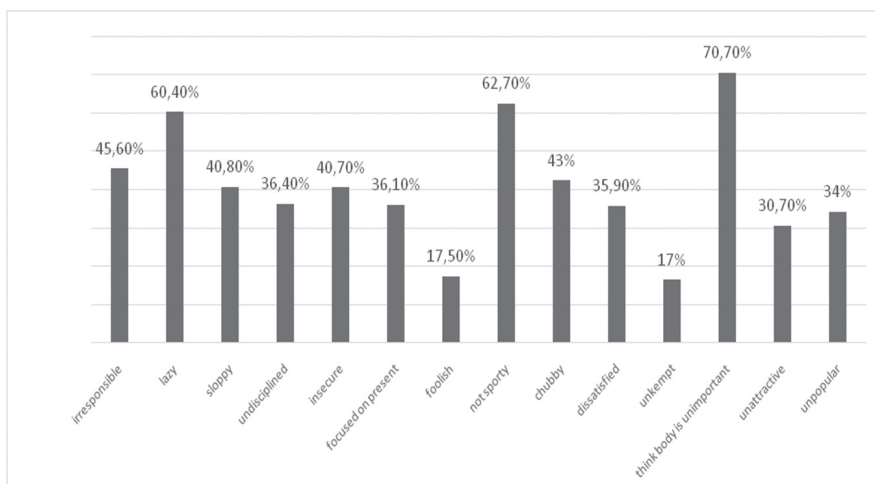


Figure 5. Results of the „Eater Images bipolar Scale” regarding physical inactivity

Using student t-test first, I compared female and male sub-samples regarding social images, I found some significant gender differences. Males thought that physically inactive peers are more characterized by "foolish" images while girls evaluate "well-groomed" and "thinks body is important" images higher on inactive students.

Next, I analyzed the relationship between social images and activity level. It was realized that activity level had significant impact on social images. Students from the highly active group significantly reported that inactive peers are more characterized by "irresponsible", "lazy", "sloppy", "undisciplined", "insecure", "focused on present", "not sporty", "chubby" and "unattractive" images.

Table 1. Means of regularly active peers prototypes among male and female students

	Males		Females	
	Means	S.D.	Means	S.D.
<b>Wise/Foolish*</b>	3.73	1.31	3.44	1.35
<b>Unkempt/Well-groomed***</b>	4.27	1.30	4.90	1.46
<b>Thin body is unimportant/important**</b>	3.84	1.84	4.18	1.54
	Low active group		High active group	
	Means	S.D.	Means	S.D.
<b>Irresponsible/Responsible***</b>	4.03	1.54	3.49	1.61
<b>Active/Lazy***</b>	4.43	1.68	4.88	1.67
<b>Sloppy/Meticulous**</b>	3.98	1.48	3.61	1.48
<b>Undisciplined/Disciplined***</b>	4.32	1.46	3.79	1.54
<b>Self-confident/Insecure*</b>	4.04	1.48	4.37	1.54
<b>Focused on future/Present*</b>	3.91	1.40	4.24	1.52
<b>Not sporty/Sporty*</b>	3.38	1.56	3.05	1.69
<b>Chubby/Slim**</b>	3.96	1.39	3.56	1.38
<b>Attractive/Unattractive**</b>	3.83	1.35	4.19	1.38

Note: Student t-test, \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*p<0.001

To detect the structure of prototype perceptions, exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was used. Eigenvalues above 1 and factor loadings greater than 0.3 were applied (Kaiser's criterion). Table 2 shows the final factor structure.

The analyses produced four-factor solution. Factor 1 was labeled "negative personality factor" which included images such as: irresponsible, sloppy, undisciplined, unkempt. Lazy, insecure, focused on present and foolish adjectives.



tives were correlated negatively to this factor. Factor 2 was labeled “non athlete factor” which included the following images: irresponsible, undisciplined, not sporty, chubby, thinks body is unimportant. Lazy image was negatively correlated to this factor. Factor 3 was labeled “undesirable factor” with the following adjectives: lazy, insecure, foolish, dissatisfied, unattractive and unpopular. Factor 4 was labeled “negative appearance factor” which included the following items: chubby, unkempt, body is unimportant, and foolish, was negatively correlated. All of the factors had satisfactory reliability (Cronbach’s aloha) and variance explained was 66.76% for this four-factor solution.

Table 2. Final factor structure for the physically inactive peers prototypes

	1. factor	2. factor	3. factor	4. factor
Physically inactive peer is:				
<b>1.Irresponsible</b>	<b>0.679</b>	<b>0.474</b>	-	-
<b>2.Lazy</b>	-0.344	-0.665	<b>0.385</b>	-
<b>3.Sloppy</b>	<b>0.759</b>	-	-	-
<b>4.Undisciplined</b>	<b>0.678</b>	<b>0.375</b>	-	-
<b>5.Insecure</b>	-0.382	-	<b>0.629</b>	-
<b>6.Focused on present</b>	-0.746	-	-	-
<b>7.Foolish</b>	-0.635	-	<b>0.340</b>	-0.381
<b>8. Not sporty</b>	-	<b>0.822</b>	-	-
<b>9. Chubby</b>	-	<b>0.602</b>	-	<b>0.400</b>
<b>10. Dissatisfied</b>	-	-	<b>0.781</b>	-
<b>11. Unkempt</b>	<b>0.387</b>	-	-	<b>0.736</b>
<b>12. Thinks body is unimportant</b>	-	<b>0.370</b>	-	<b>0.702</b>
<b>13. Unattractive</b>	-	-	<b>0.571</b>	-
<b>14. Unpopular</b>	-	-	<b>0.678</b>	-
Factor label	„Negative personality”	„Non athlete”	„Non desirable”	„Negative appearance”
Factors’ eigenvalues	2.96	2.25	2.24	1.88
Variance%	21.17%	16.09%	16.03%	13.47%
Cronbach’s alpha	0.816	0.794	0.732	0.686

Note: Only factor loadings > 0.3 are included (Kaiser’s criterion). Cronbach alpha coefficients display the reliability of the scales

## CONCLUSION

University students are an important target group for health promotion programs. Although there are many health promotion programs targeting young people's activity level we cannot experience a significant increase in it (VAN SLUIJS ET AL. 2007). Among them, beside the frequency of health risk behaviors (namely, smoking, alcohol use and binge drinking) physical inactivity also means a risk factor for the quality of life (BRASSAI ET AL. 2006).

In my recent study, results supported previous researchers since in my sample respondents did not achieve the desirable activity level. Therefore, health promotion programs targeting this population should be sought after.

It is also realized that sport clubs have a significant role in increasing the activity level. Based on this, more attention to organized sport could help university students to be more active in their free time. Competition and cups among them are a good opportunity for active lifestyle.

I found that sport has a main role in forming informal groups and communities. Intervention programs should focus on peers since most of the respondents take part in leisure time activity with their friends and classmates. In this lifetime intrinsic motivation (such as health, friends, and entertainment) are more important, than earlier (PIKÓ ET AL. 2004).

Regarding social images about physically inactive peers I found that images about physically inactive peers are quite negative, so "lazy", "not sporty" and "body is unimportant" adjectives were popular. I found that there are significant differences in prototype perception regarding gender and activity level. Structure of prototype perception is well separated by personality and appearance factors. In this study the factor analytical analyses verified that un/healthy Eater Images scale could be valid to measure physical inactivity images, but developing a complex measurement could help to understand images specially attached to physical inactivity

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### *A sportoló fiatalokról alkotott szociális képzetek*

Az ülő, inaktív életmód rohamos terjedése kiemelt népegészségügyi problémaként jelenik meg, hiszen korai halálhoz vezet, illetve jelentős mértékben hozzájárul a különféle krónikus betegségek kialakulásához is. Az egyetemista populáció az egészségpszichológiai kutatások kiemelt célcsoportját jelenti, hiszen ebben az életkorban az egészség-magatartási szokásokat számos mediátor és moderátor tényező befolyásolja. A korábbi szakirodalomból ismeretes, hogy a szociodemográfiai háttértényezők mellett a társas hatások is jelentős mértékben befolyásolják a sportolási szokásokat. A társas hatásokon belül pedig a szociális képzetek (prototípusok) kiemelt jelentőségét számos korábbi kutatás bizonyította már.

Jelen kutatásomat 18–31 éves ( $M = 21,05$  év;  $S. D. = 2,38$ ; 53,1% fiú, 46,9% lány; válaszadási arány = 79,23) magyar és külföldi egyetemi hallgatók körében végeztem a Szegedi Tudományegyetemen ( $N = 515$ ). A kérdőív itemei a szociodemográfiai háttér mellett kiterjedtek a sportolási szokásokra, a társas környezet aktivitási szintjére, a sportmotivációs struktúrára, az aktív és inaktív fiatalokról alkotott szociális képzetekre, a tervezett cselekvés elméletének elemeire és a prototípus/hajlandóság modelljére, a versengő attitűdre, a valakizhez való tartozás igényére, a társas összehasonlításra, a társas hálózatokra és a társas támogatásra is. Azonban ebben a tanulmányban a fizikailag inaktív fiatalokról alkotott szociális képzetekre fókuszáltam.

Az adatokat elemezve azt tapasztaltam, hogy a megkérdezett egyetemisták aktivitási szintje nem kielégítő, a sportklubok jelentős szerepet töltenek be az egyetemi hallgatók szabadidős sportolási szokásában, és többségük barátaikkal, csoporttársaikkal vesz részt szabadidős sporttevékenységben. A fizikailag inaktív fiatalokról alkotott szociális képzetük döntően negatív. A „lusta”, „nem sportos” és a „külső nem fontos” voltak a leggyakoribb jellemzők. A prototípus-ész-

lelésben szignifikáns különbségeket találtam a nemi hovatarozást és sportolói státust illetően. A prototípus-észlelés struktúrájában pedig a személyiséggel és külső megjelenéssel kapcsolatos faktorok jól elkülönültek egymástól.

Röviden elmondhatjuk, hogy a szociális képzetek megismerése segítheti a gyakorlati egészségfejlesztő munkát. Ezeknek a programoknak a meglévő szociális képzetekre való építés jelentheti az alapját.

*Kulcsszavak:* szociális képzetek, egyetemista fiatalok, fizikai inaktivitás, sportolási szokások, befolyásoló tényezők

### *Socijalne predstave o fizički neaktivnim mladima*

Naglo širenje sedećeg, inaktivnog načina života se javlja kao istaknut problem u opštoj zaštiti zdravlja, pošto dovodi do prevremenog mortaliteta, odnosno u znatnoj meri doprinosi i formiranju raznih hroničnih oboljenja. Studentska populacija predstavlja istaknutu ciljnu grupu zdravstveno-psiholoških istraživanja, naime u ovoj dobi na navike zdravstvenog ponašanja utiču brojni medijatorski i moderatorski faktori. Na osnovu ranije naučne literature poznato je da pored sociodemografskih pozadinskih faktora i društvena dejstva u znatnoj meri utiču na sportske navike. Dok u sklopu društvenih dejstava istaknuti značaj socijalnih predstava (prototipa) je našao svoj dokaz u velikom broju ranijih studija.

Ovo istraživanje je sprovedeno na Univerzitetu u Segedinu u krugu mađarskih i stranih studenata (N = 515) dobi od 18–31 godine (M = 21,05 godina; S. D. = 2,38; 53,1% mladića, 46,9% devojaka, proporcija datih odgovora = 79,23). Stavke upitnika pored sociodemografske pozadine obuhvatile su i navike sportskih aktivnosti, nivo aktivnosti društvene sredine, strukturu sportske motivacije, socijalne predstave stvorene o aktivnim i neaktivnim mladima, elemente teorije planiranih radnji i model prototipa/voljnosti, takmičarski stav, potrebu za pripadanjem nekome, društveno upoređivanje, kao i društvene mreže i društvenu podršku. Međutim, u fokusu ove studije stoje socijalne predstave stvorene o fizički neaktivnim mladima.

Analiza podataka je pokazala da nivo aktivnosti ispitanih studenata nije zadovoljavajući, da sportski klubovi igraju značajnu ulogu u stvaranju navika studenata vezane za bavljenje sportom u slobodnom vremenu, i većina njih učestvuje u tim aktivnostima u društvu prijatelja i drugova iz studijske grupe. Njihova socijalna predstava stvorena o fizički neaktivnim mladima je presudno negativna. „Lenji”, „nesportski”, „spoljašnji izgled nevažan” su bile najčešće karakterizacije za njih. U opažanju prototipa su se javile signifikantne razlike što se tiče polne pripadnosti i stava prema sportu, dok u strukturi opažanja prototipa su se faktori vezani za ličnost i za spoljašnji izgled jasno razdvojili.

Ukratko se može reći da upoznavanje socijalnih predstava može da pomogne u praksi zdravstvenog razvoja. U baziranju ovih programa mogu da pomognu nadogradnje na postojeće socijalne predstave.

*Ključne reči:* socijalne predstave, studentska omladina, fizička neaktivnost, sportske navike, faktori

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