

FACTORS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OF 13-14-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN IN SELECTED MUNICIPALITIES OF LITHUANIA

Project implementation period: 2014–2016

For the purpose of preparing the measures promoting physical activity, it is important to take into account not only the age of the target group, but also individual factors as well as other factors pertaining to the micro and macro physical and social environment of a specific area. A deeper analysis of the cause and factors related to the decrease in physical activity (PA), as well as the targeted interventions that would be further prepared and implemented on their basis, could contribute to slowing the negative trend.

Aim. To assess factors having impact on 13–14-year-old children physical activity in the selected municipalities of Lithuania.

Methodology. A descriptive analytical research was carried out considering 13–14-year-old children as the target population of research. By applying the questionnaire survey method 2 962 parents or guardians of the mentioned students' age were interviewed in 6 selected municipalities of Lithuania.

Results. The research determined nearly equal part of physically active children and physically passive children in selected municipalities, respectively 50.7 and 49.3 percent. The main factors having significant impact on children's PA in these municipalities were as follows: gender, residence place, number of child's friends, number of children in the family, family PA, family support when participating in competitions, events at school, and free of charge PA at school. The impact of living outside the urban area on physical activity was only observed in one municipality. Significant influence of family PA and family support in child's PA both were found as important in two municipalities. Children's participation in school's events significantly increased their PA, free of charge PA at school was a significant factor, and children who had more than 3 friends were more physically active in three municipalities. Only every second child attends physically active extra-curriculum activity, one of five does not attend any one. The main reasons explaining why children are not engaged in physically active leisure activities at school include the absence of motivation and unwillingness, lack of time, limited availability mainly due to large distances between home and school, and tight supply to engage in attractive physically active activities. Public infrastructure created for the purpose of physical activities was assessed more favourably only in two municipalities. The most frequently mentioned arguments preventing families to engage in physically active activities include the lack of time (for families living in cities) and the sufficient level of movement at home and work (for families living in towns and villages).

On the average, every second respondent, regardless of whether their child is physically active or passive, indicates that the municipality should take appropriate actions to increase physical activity. More participants from physically active children group than from physically passive children group emphasized the need of higher personal and school contribution. Physical activity of children mostly depends on their own willingness, will, motivation, perception of the benefit from physical activity as well as encouragement and personal examples and planning of active leisure time. Schools were seen as important setting in enabling and empowering children to be engaged in physical activities; offering various alternative extra-curriculum activities; ensuring the quality of physical education, improving infrastructure for physical activities. Participants highlighted the need to promote greater awareness of the importance and benefit from physical education. Holding events for children and their families, involving passive children to physical activities also, making focus especially on girls; also creating appropriate and friendly environment; removing the stigma would enhance the access to physical activities. The proper conditions for the physical activities,

especially in rural areas – setting up new and more public areas; ensuring the quality and safety of existing ones; organizing different events for families and funding of the appropriate projects could also promote physical activity.

Conclusions. Measures promoting physical activity should be based on the objective situation analysis in specific municipality and school and by focusing on factors having an impact on PA and opinion of users.

For more information please contact dr. Aldona Jociutė, Acting Head of the Research Unit, Department of the Public Health Technology Centre, e-mail aldona.jociute@hi.lt.