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ABSTRACT

The aim of this particular study is to evaluate the habits of Greek male and female students, regarding healthy nutrition, physical activity, abstinence from smoking and stress control and to check if there are any differences in these areas between the sexes. For this study 163 male and female students from a private educational institute, average age eleven and a half, were tested. Our evaluation was done according to the questionnaire on healthy behavior (22). It was found that the majority of students lead a healthy way of life regarding the four parameters we examined. Namely: they had healthy eating habits, train on a regular basis, do not smoke and satisfactorily control stressful situations. It was also found that there was no significant statistical difference between the boys and the girls, although it was found that girls seem to be better informed about foods they must avoid and are less likely to be tempted by them, have people to talk to when under pressure and are more able to refuse when offered a cigarette. The fact that it was also discovered that a small percentage of students seems to have adopted unhealthy habits encourages us to recommend the application of programmes that aim at teaching a broad spectrum of healthy attitudes.

Key Words: *healthy eating, physical activity, smoking, stress, junior school pupils.*

INTRODUCTION

A big debate is taking place in contemporary society as to the best way of influencing young people to adopt healthy life-styles. Since it is in our school years that the basic habits and attitudes that govern adult life are established, this is the age on which our efforts should be focussed. The attitudes of each individual reveal how positive or negative he is in coping with a problem as well as how broad a view of things he takes. A positive stance is conducive to positive behaviour (13).

The results of recent inquiries into children's dietary habits, their participation in physical activities, the rapid increase in the number of teenage smokers and the general increase in stress in their lives are particularly worrying. (16). Research has shown that while the number of obese and overweight teenagers has tripled over the last twenty years, physical activity decreases with age (3), the sharpest drop in physical activity occurring during the transition from childhood to adolescence (10). As far as the health-damaging habit of smoking is concerned, it is acquired in adolescence, giving rise not just to health problems but to behavioural ones as well (7). Research carried out on Mexican-American adolescents concluded that smokers were more likely to become involved with behaviour that put to risk their health and safety than non-smokers (14). In Europe 30 out of a hundred adolescents are smokers. In the U.S.A. and Canada, in spite of the fact that there has been a significant reduction in the number of smokers in the general population over recent decades, this does not hold true for adolescents (15). Teenage smokers tend to avoid exercise and healthy food and tend to team up with kids who are mixed up in drug-taking and with violence (21).

Another important factor which has a negative effect on teenagers' physical and mental health is stress. The way in which a young person copes with the stress in his life immediately relates to his psychological adjustment (5). Research carried out on American adolescents confirmed that there was a direct link between levels of stress and the resort to different substances, including tobacco (26). The scientists maintain that involvement in physical activities lowers stress levels and is a positive factor in the development of healthy behaviour (6). It has also been observed that the more positive a person's attitude towards exercise is the more positive will be his attitude towards a healthy diet (2).

A significant number of programmes promoting healthy life-styles have been implemented in schools around the world (1). Related studies have been carried out in Greece which support the view that action has to be taken to educate children into healthy ways of behaving. A very important study, carried out in 2002 on a large sample of Greek adolescents came to the conclu-

sion that there was a noticeable increase in unhealthy behaviour (smoking, drugs, violence) as children moved from middle- to high-school and, at the same time, a reduction in healthy habits (diet, exercise, athletics) (20). Studies confirm an increase in obesity among Greek schoolchildren as well as their poor level of participation in physical activities (11). Non-obese children are significantly more active on a daily basis (23).

A recent study of Greek students in the fifth and sixth years of primary school confirms that overweight and obese kids have adopted unhealthy eating habits, spend more time watching television per week and participate less in athletic activities than the rest (9). Over the last decade programmes have been implemented in Greek schools aiming at promoting a healthier life-style. A long-term programme involving primary schoolchildren in Crete had positive results in terms of increased activity, Body Mass Index, increase of knowledge about health, etc (12). Another research programme carried out with the active involvement of eleven-year-old Greek schoolchildren came to the conclusion that the programme had positive effects on their health-habits (4).

PURPOSE

The purpose of the present study was to examine: a) whether there is any difference between boys and girls when it comes to health habits, and b) what sort of behaviour pupils in the 6th grade of primary school display in this area, particular attention being paid to the issues of correct diet, participation in physical activities, avoidance of smoking and coping with stress.

METHODOLOGY

163 pupils of a private school in Attiki, Greece, 83 boys and 80 girls, born in 1996 and then in the final year of primary school, participated in the study. At the time they completed the questionnaires they were about 11 ½ years old. The study took place in September 2007 and was carried out according to the questionnaire set (22) which estimates awareness of and behaviour towards nutrition, stress, smoking, exercise and doping (a factor omitted from the present study). For each of the health factors there are six questions to each of which there is a choice of five answers, ranging from "Never" to "Always". In total there are twenty four questions. The questionnaires were explained and administered by the pupils' own teachers who explained to them that the questionnaires were part of a project to study the attitudes and be-

haviour of young people of their age towards health habits. They also reassured them that neither would their replies play any part in their evaluation nor would they even be seen by other members of staff. The replies would be completely anonymous, pupils only being required to indicate their age and sex. It should be mentioned that pupils in private schools in Greece come from families higher on the economic and social scale than average.

ANALYSIS

The analysis of the questionnaire was carried out with the SPSS. The following statistical means were used: a) the test X2 in order to determine whether the given frequencies showed statistically significant differences between the sexes. The level of statistical significance was set at 0,05. The null hypothesis was that there is no statistically significance difference between boys and girls and b) Parentages in order to estimate the preferences of the students concerning the categories of the answers.

The pupils answered the questionnaires of the Likert type by choosing from the following scale – never – almost never – sometimes – nearly always – always. Each question is regarded as a variable to which the answer is to be found somewhere on this scale. The following four tables comprise the four factors: Diet, stress, smoking and exercise. Each table contains: a) the frequencies of the answers, b) the percentages, c) the value of X2, d) the level of significance “p”, and e) the degrees of freedom (df).

Results concerning the differences between boys and girls

Table 1. Dietary behaviour

DIET		Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Nearly always	Always	Pearson X ²
1. I eat a variety of fruit every day	Boys	Amount N = 82	12,2% 10	9,8% 8	23,2% 19	23,2% 19	X ² = 1,340 df = 4 p = 0,855
	Girls	Amount N = 80	10,0% 8	7,5% 6	26,3% 21	18,8% 15	
	Total	Amount N = 162	11,1% 18	8,6% 14	24,7% 40	21,0% 34	

2. I have a full breakfast	Boys	Amount	6,0%	21,7%	28,9%	21,7%	21,7%	$\chi^2 = 7,233$ df = 4 p = 0,124
		N = 83	5	18	24	18	18	
	Girls	Amount	15,0%	23,8%	18,8%	13,8%	28,8%	
		N = 80	12	19	15	11	23	
	Total	Amount	10,4%	22,7%	23,9%	17,8%	25,2%	
		N = 163	17	37	39	29	41	
3. I avoid eating too much sweets	Boys	Amount	2,4%	9,8%	30,5%	26,8%	30,5%	$\chi^2 = 9,549$ df = 4 p = 0,05*
		N = 82	2	8	25	22	25	
	Girls	Amount	5,0%	1,3%	27,5%	20,0%	46,3%	
		N = 80	4	1	22	16	37	
	Total	Amount	3,7%	5,6%	29,0%	23,5%	38,3%	
		N = 162	6	9	47	38	62	
4. I know what the food I eat contains	Boys	Amount	9,3%	6,7%	18,7%	24,0%	41,3%	$\chi^2 = 1,071$ df = 4 p = 0,899
		N = 75	7	5	14	18	31	
	Girls	Amount	7,6%	6,3%	13,9%	24,1%	48,1%	
		N = 79	6	5	11	19	38	
	Total	Amount	8,4%	6,5%	16,2%	24,0%	44,8%	
		N = 154	13	10	25	37	69	
5. I know which foods to avoid	Boys	Amount	6,2%	8,6%	8,6%	32,1%	44,4%	$\chi^2 = 14,471$ df = 4 p = 0,006*
		N = 81	5	7	7	26	36	
	Girls	Amount	1,3%	5,2%	9,1%	13,0%	71,4%	
		N = 77	1	4	7	10	55	
	Total	Amount	3,8%	7,0%	8,9%	22,8%	57,6%	
		N = 158	6	11	14	36	91	
6. I know the correct proportions of a balanced diet	Boys	Amount	7,5%	3,8%	21,3%	17,5%	50,0%	$\chi^2 = 6,153$ df = 4 p = 0,188
		N = 80	6	3	17	14	40	
	Girls	Amount	2,6%	5,1%	14,1%	30,8%	47,4%	
		N = 78	2	4	11	24	37	
	Total	Amount	5,1%	4,4%	17,7%	24,1%	48,7%	
		N = 158	8	7	28	38	77	

* Statistically significant difference

From the above table it seems that there is no statistically significant difference between the sexes in their answers to questions 1, 2, 4 and 6, which refer to fruit, breakfast, knowledge of food ingredients and the proportions of a balanced diet. There was a marginal statistical difference in the responses to question 3, referring to over-consumption of sweets. From the percentages it can be seen that 46.3% of girls always avoid over-consumption of sweets, against 30.5% for boys, while almost twice as many boys than girls declare that they never or nearly never avoid sweets.

A statistically significant difference was found in answers to question 5, referring to knowledge of which foods were not beneficial to health. The girls showed themselves better informed on this subject than the boys. Specifically, from the percentages it can be seen that 71.4% of the girls, as opposed to 44,4% of the boys chose “always” when asked whether they knew which food to avoid.

Table 2. Stress

STRESS			Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Nearly always	Always	Pearson χ^2
1. It's easy for me to relax when I get stressed	Boys	Amount N = 83	14,5% 12	6,0% 5	33,7% 28	27,7% 23	18,1% 15	$\chi^2 = 4,282$ df = 4 p = 0,369
	Girls	Amount N = 78	19,2% 15	11,5% 9	26,9% 21	19,2% 15	23,1% 18	
	Total	Amount N = 161	16,8% 27	8,7% 14	30,4% 49	23,6% 38	20,5% 33	
2. There are people around me in whom I can confide when I have a problem	Boys	Amount N = 79	7,6% 6	1,3% 1	17,7% 14	16,5% 13	57,0% 45	$\chi^2 = 10,218$ df = 4 p = 0,037*
	Girls	Amount N = 79	0% 0	3,8% 3	10,1% 8	25,3% 20	60,8% 48	
	Total	Amount N = 158	3,8% 6	2,5% 4	13,9% 22	20,9% 33	58,9% 93	
3. I can foresee situations that will increase pressure on me and take steps to deal with them	Boys	Amount N = 83	9,6% 8	6,0% 5	30,1% 25	27,7% 23	26,5% 22	$\chi^2 = 1,225$ df = 4 p = 0,874
	Girls	Amount N = 77	6,5% 5	9,1% 7	28,6% 22	26,0% 20	29,9% 23	
	Total	Amount N = 160	8,1% 13	7,5% 12	29,4% 47	26,9% 43	28,1% 45	
4. I recognize the physical signs of stress	Boys	Amount N = 78	32,1% 25	9,0% 7	21,8% 17	19,2% 15	17,9% 14	$\chi^2 = 1,745$ df = 4 p = 0,783
	Girls	Amount N = 79	29,1% 23	6,3% 5	25,3% 20	15,2% 12	24,1% 19	
	Total	Amount N = 157	30,6% 48	7,6% 12	23,6% 37	17,2% 27	21,0% 33	
5. I know how to relax when I am feeling tense	Boys	Amount N = 78	10,3% 8	12,8% 10	25,6% 20	21,8% 17	29,5% 23	$\chi^2 = 0,792$ df = 4 p = 0,940
	Girls	Amount N = 75	10,7% 8	10,7% 8	21,3% 16	22,7% 17	34,7% 26	
	Total	Amount N = 153	10,5% 16	11,8% 18	23,5% 36	22,2% 34	32,0% 49	

6. I know how to organize my time so as not to be under too much pressure	Boys	Amount	10,1%	6,3%	20,3%	34,2%	29,1%	$\chi^2 = 7,733$ df = 4 p = 0,102
		N = 79	8	5	16	27	23	
	Girls	Amount	9,2%	1,3%	23,7%	21,1%	44,7%	
		N = 76	7	1	18	16	34	
	Total	Amount	9,7%	3,9%	21,9%	27,7%	36,8%	
		N = 155	15	6	34	43	57	

* Statistically significant difference

From the above it seems that there is no statistically significant difference between the sexes with regard to their answers to questions 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6. Such a difference did occur with regard to question 2, referring to people to whom they could confide their problems. It seems as though more boys (17.7% sometimes, 1.3% almost never, 7.6% never) than girls (10.1% sometimes, 3.8% almost never, 0% never) have no one to talk to. The numbers of pupils who have people around them in whom they can confide is, for boys, "Always" and "Nearly always" 57% and 16.5% and for girls "Always" at 60.8% and "Nearly always" at 16.5%

Table 3. *Attitude towards smoking*

SMOKING		Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Nearly always	Always	Pearson χ^2	
1. I refuse cigarettes offered me	Boys	Amount	11,3%	1,3%	3,8%	2,5%	81,3%	$\chi^2 = 5,720$ df = 4 p = 0,221
		N = 80	9	1	3	2	65	
	Girls	Amount	5,0%	2,5%	1,3%	0%	91,3%	
		N = 80	4	2	1	0	73	
	Total	Amount	8,1%	1,9%	2,5%	1,3%	86,3%	
		N = 160	13	3	4	2	138	
2. I avoid smoking	Boys	Amount	10,8%	2,4%	1,2%	4,8%	80,7%	$\chi^2 = 8,892$ df = 4 p = 0,064
		N = 83	9	2	1	4	67	
	Girls	Amount	5,1%	,0%	3,8%	0%	91,0%	
		N = 79	4	0	3	0	71	
	Total	Amount	8,1%	1,2%	2,5%	2,5%	85,7%	
		N = 162	13	2	4	4	138	
3. When someone's smoking bothers me I either tell him or get away from him	Boys	Amount	9,8%	6,1%	6,1%	11,0%	67,1%	$\chi^2 = 7,753$ df = 4 p = 0,101
		N = 82	8	5	5	9	55	
	Girls	Amount	2,6%	1,3%	2,6%	14,5%	78,9%	
		N = 76	2	1	2	11	60	
	Total	Amount	6,3%	3,8%	4,4%	12,7%	72,8%	
		N = 158	10	6	7	20	115	

4. I know how to say no when offered a cigarette	Boys	Amount	11,4%	3,8%	2,5%	1,3%	81,0%	$\chi^2 = 10,871$ df = 4 p = 0,028*
		N = 79	9	3	2	1	64	
	Girls	Amount	0%	1,3%	2,5%	1,3%	94,9%	
		N = 79	0	1	2	1	75	
	Total	Amount	5,7%	2,5%	2,5%	1,3%	88,0%	
		N = 158	9	4	4	2	139	
5. I know how to stand up to pressure from my friends to smoke in order, supposedly, to be liked	Boys	Amount	13,3%	0%	3,6%	3,6%	79,5%	$\chi^2 = 4,936$ df = 4 p = 0,177
		N = 83	11	0	3	3	66	
	Girls	Ποσοστά	3,8%	0%	5,1%	2,5%	88,6%	
		N = 79	3	0	4	2	70	
	Total	Amount	8,6%	0%	4,3%	3,1%	84,0%	
		N = 162	14	0	7	5	136	
6. I can see through the advertisements that encourage us to smoke	Boys	Amount	13,6%	2,5%	7,4%	4,9%	71,6%	$\chi^2 = 2,039$ df = 4 p = 0,729
		N = 81	11	2	6	4	58	
	Girls	Amount	13,0%	,0%	6,5%	5,2%	75,3%	
		N = 77	10	0	5	4	58	
	Total	Amount	13,3%	1,3%	7,0%	5,1%	73,4%	
		N = 158	21	2	11	8	116	

* Statistically significant difference

From the above table it appears that there is no significant difference between the sexes with regard to their replies to questions 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6. A significant statistical difference was revealed in answers to question 4, where it appears that girls turn down offered cigarettes more firmly. Maybe this result is due to 11.4% of the boys who answered “Never” against the 0% of the girls.

Table 4. *Attitude towards exercise*

EXERCISE		Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Nearly always	Always	Pearson χ^2	
1. Exercise is a part of my everyday life.	Boys	Amount	7,3%	4,9%	13,4%	23,2%	51,2%	$\chi^2 = 3,008$ df = 4 p = 0,556
		N = 82	6	4	11	19	42	
	Girls	Amount	2,6%	2,6%	12,8%	21,8%	60,3%	
		N = 78	2	2	10	17	47	
	Total	Amount	5,0%	3,8%	13,1%	22,5%	55,6%	
		N = 160	8	6	21	36	89	

2. I avoid a sedentary life. I always try to involve myself in interesting activities	Boys	Amount N = 80	6,3% 5	6,3% 5	17,5% 14	33,8% 27	36,3% 29	$\chi^2 = 0,834$ df = 4 p = 0,934
	Girls	Amount N = 78	6,4% 5	5,1% 4	23,1% 18	30,8% 24	34,6% 27	
	Total	Amount N = 158	6,3% 10	5,7% 9	20,3% 32	32,3% 51	35,4% 56	
3. I avoid relaxing in front of the television. I prefer exercise because it improves my appearance and my health	Boys	Amount N = 81	8,6% 7	11,1% 9	30,9% 25	22,2% 18	27,2% 22	$\chi^2 = 2,336$ df = 4 p = 0,674
	Girls	Amount N = 78	10,3% 8	5,1% 4	34,6% 27	25,6% 20	24,4% 19	
	Total	Amount N = 159	9,4% 15	8,2% 13	32,7% 52	23,9% 38	25,8% 41	
4. I take part in activities that increase my stamina. I run from 15 to 30 minutes three times a week	Boys	Amount N = 81	8,6% 7	14,8% 12	25,9% 21	13,6% 11	37,0% 30	$\chi^2 = 2,939$ df = 4 p = 0,568
	Girls	Amount N = 77	5,2% 4	10,4% 8	20,8% 16	18,2% 14	45,5% 35	
	Total	Amount N = 158	7,0% 11	12,7% 20	23,4% 37	15,8% 25	41,1% 65	
5. I do exercise to increase my strength (for example push-ups and sit-ups) between 15 and 30 minutes three times a week	Boys	Amount N = 79	8,9% 7	12,7% 10	29,1% 23	17,7% 14	31,6% 25	$\chi^2 = 7,425$ df = 4 p = 0,115
	Girls	Amount N = 78	2,6% 2	5,1% 4	25,6% 20	23,1% 18	43,6% 34	
	Total	Amount N = 157	5,7% 9	8,9% 14	27,4% 43	20,4% 32	37,6% 59	
6. I take part in at least one leisure activity (e.g. cycling, skiing or bowling) with my friends or family every week	Boys	Amount N = 81	6,2% 5	6,2% 5	19,8% 16	16,0% 13	51,9% 42	$\chi^2 = 9,499$ df = 4 p = 0,050*
	Girls	Amount N = 78	2,6% 2	3,8% 3	10,3% 8	34,6% 27	48,7% 38	
	Total	Amount N = 159	4,4% 7	5,0% 8	15,1% 24	25,2% 40	50,3% 80	

* Statistically significant difference

The above information suggests that there are no significant differences between the sexes in their replies to question 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. Most of the boys and girls seem to take part in regular physical activities. A marginal statistical difference appears in the replies to question 6, concerning activities in the students' free time. This difference is maybe due to "Nearly always" column, where the percentage of the boy's answers is 16% while that of the girls is 34,6%.

Results concerning the healthy behaviour of both of boys and girls

Diet

As far as the healthy dietary habits of the pupils both boys and girls is concerned it was ascertained that most of them (80.4%) are well informed about what they should eat to have good health and try to follow a healthy diet on a daily basis. (Table 1, question 5, answering “always” or “almost always”). Not a few of them, however, don't have breakfast (33.1%. Table 1, question 2, answering “never” or “nearly never”). Additionally, a sizeable number of pupils answered that they “never” or “hardly ever” ate a variety of fresh fruit on a daily basis (19.7%), as is shown in the responses to question 1, table 1. Finally, a noteworthy number of pupils (38.3%) said that they “never”, “almost never” or sometimes avoid the over-consumption of sweets. (Table 1, question 3). It also appears that the girls are more abstinent in this aspect than the boys.

Stress

With reference to stress, 44.1% of the pupils declared that they “nearly always” or “always” find ways to relax when they are under pressure (Table 2, question 1). A large number of them (79.8%) also say that they have people around who they can talk to when necessary. (Table 2, question 2, answers “nearly always” and “always”). The majority of them (55%) also say that they can “always” or “nearly always” foresee the circumstances arising that will bring them under increased pressure and take measures to tackle them. (Table 2, question 3.) Another sizeable group, however, (38.2%) find it difficult to recognize the physical signs of stress. (Table 2, question 4 – “never”, “almost never”). A noteworthy number of pupils (22.3%) also declare that they almost never find a way of relaxing when under pressure (Table 2, question 5.) Most of them (64.5%) believe that they can “nearly always” or “always” manage their time in a way that reduces pressure. (Table 2, question 6).

Smoking

As far as smoking is concerned the results were very encouraging because the large majority (87.6%) was against smoking as a habit (Table 3, question 1 – “nearly always” and “always”). A large number (88.3%) also say that they “nearly always” or “always” avoid cigarettes (Table 3, question 2). Equally high (85.5%) was the number of pupils who said that they distanced themselves from smokers when annoyed by their smoke (Table 3, question 3 – “nearly always” & “always”). Most of the pupils (89.3%) “nearly always” or “always” refuse when offered cigarettes (Table 3, question 4). They also declare (92.6%) that they always or nearly always resist the pressure of their friends to smoke.

(Table 3, question 5). They also declare that they can decode the messages of cigarette advertisements (78.5% - Table 3, question 6). There is however, a significant number (10%) of pupils who have a positive attitude towards smoking, answering “never” and “nearly never” when asked if they refuse offered cigarettes (Table 3, question 1). Also, we can't be indifferent to the fact that 12.9% of the pupils declared that they “never” or “almost never” turned down their friends' offers of cigarettes. This group is prospective smokers.

Exercise

With reference to participation in exercise, 78.1% said that it “always” or “nearly always” formed a part of their daily routine. (Table 4, question 1) Also high (67.7%) were the numbers of those who said that they “nearly always” or “always” avoid a sedentary life, preferring to take part in physical activities. (Table 4, question 2). Not a few declare that this doesn't happen very often (20.3%). Many students (49.7%) say that they prefer physical activity to watching television because it improves their health and appearance (Table 4, question 3 – “nearly always” and “always”). Noteworthy however is the number of pupils (32.7%) who say that they only act that way sometimes. A majority (56.9%) declare that they “nearly always” or “always” run for 15 to 30 minutes, three times a week or do strengthening exercises (58%. Table 4, questions 4 & 5) It does, however, seem to us that quite a number of pupils (19.7%) never or nearly never do even that and need to be urged to change their attitudes and informed about the benefits of systematic exercise. Very many children, however, (75.5%) do participate “nearly always” or “always” in free time athletic activities, this being particularly true for the girls. (Table 4, question 6).

DISCUSSION

The present study confirmed that most of the pupils have a healthy way of life as far as the four parameters investigated were concerned. That is, the pupils had good dietary habits, exercise regularly, don't smoke and manage stress levels well.

According to Theodorakis and Papaioannou (2002) it seems that pupils' behaviour and attitudes tend to be grouped both in the direction of healthy and of unhealthy habits. The two writers, in research done on Greek pupils, relate exercise to the cultivation of other healthy habits, noting that taking part in physical activities isn't an isolated activity but it influences and is influenced by diet, smoking, connections with drugs and involvement with violence. This is confirmed by the World Health Organization which has noted that children and young people who regularly take part in physical activities adopt healthy ways of behaving and are better able to handle depression and stress (27).

In the present study a large number of pupils declared that they exercised regularly and avoided a sedentary way of life. The number of pupils who say that they relax watching television is noteworthy. According to Wake, Hesketh and Waters (2003) under-mobility is linked with many hours spent in front of the box as well as the increase in childhood obesity.

This trend is being observed all over the world, with the result that only 1/3 of the world's youth has a satisfactory level of physical activity. The problem is growing as the time allocated to physical activity in the school curriculum is being reduced. Young people are also devoting more of their time to television and computers (27). It is obvious that an effort must be made to draw up a programme to promote healthy habits by promoting the dissemination of information to children on the problems caused by watching too much television and the benefits to be derived from exercise. Theodorakis et al. (2005) maintains that most studies agree about the beneficial effects of exercise and cutting smoking. In the present study we have seen that although most of the pupils have negative attitudes towards smoking, 10% of them are vulnerable to acquiring this health-damaging habit in the future. The age of the present sample is, according to researchers, that at which it is likely that they will have their first contact with cigarettes (18) and that, during the course of adolescence, it will become a fixed habit that will accompany him into adulthood. One of the most important factors which influence the adolescent's decision to smoke is his already smoking friends, because research indicates that this is one way in which they improve their social status (7, 15, 16).

The present study ascertained that only 8.6% of the pupils declared that they didn't know how to withstand pressure from their friends to smoke, but it would be interesting to do further research into whether that figure, low because of the pupils' age, would stay that way. 14.6% of the pupils say that they can't work out the hidden message in advertisements and 7% say that they can sometimes. Elder et al. (1994) reminds us that adolescents are the future customers of the tobacco companies, which is why they lash out so much money on advertisements using every possible means to get their messages across to children who become familiar with them as young as six years old. Despite the fact that the results of this study are satisfactory when it comes to the general attitude towards smoking, we believe it is necessary to implement anti-smoking campaigns in schools as a part of wider health programmes, showing pupils of all ages, whether smokers or not, what the consequences of smoking actually are (15, 18, 21).

Smoking may be the result of chronic stress, the symptoms of which are difficult for the pupils themselves to recognize (22). This is borne out by the results of the present study, which show that 38% say that they can't identify the physical signs of stress. The researchers stress that mental and physical health is immediately connected with the degree to which the individual is exposed to stressful situations and the way in which this is handled in childhood

and adolescence (5). As the present study shows, exercise is one of the best antidotes to stress. But the fact that 45% declare that they don't know ("almost never", "never", "sometimes") how to relax when under pressure, strengthens the view that a school programme aimed at countering stress and the use of artificial substances would aid mental and physical health.

The present study has also ascertained that most pupils have healthy diets and know what food to avoid, which confirms the views of other researchers who believe that an athletic way of life affects other daily habits, such as nutritional ones (2, 19). Amongst our sample, however, there are a large number (33%) who declared that they never or almost never ate a full breakfast and a smaller, but still significant, number (19.7%) who say that they don't eat a variety of fruit every day. This strengthens the view that the proposed school health behaviour programme should have a component dealing with the importance of healthy nutritional habits.

In conclusion it must be said that although the results of this survey were very encouraging, it would be dangerous to generalize, the main reason being that this sample of pupils were from families of high educational and social-economic status, which significantly influences them towards healthy ways of living, which is much less likely for children from lower socio-economic levels, as confirmed by recent studies (8, 17, 24). But among the result of the present survey it is confirmed that a small number of pupils have unhealthy behaviour, which further confirms the need for the creation of school health programmes covering a wide range of health issues. The fact that programmes focusing on particular aspects of health have not proved to be particularly successful points the way to a more holistic approach the requirement of which are that it should simultaneously aim to develop physical efficiency, correct diet and avoidance of smoking (13). Researchers stress the need for creating a national health policy for schools, which could be the most important means of conveying information about healthy lifestyles to youngsters (1). In our opinion there is an urgent need for this, especially considering the fact that adolescence affords a unique chance to effectively influence behaviour, implanting healthy attitudes and habits in all children, independent of their socio-economic status, which is the best requirement for a healthy adult life.

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