

Way of life and health of Grodno University students

Tryb życia a zdrowie studentów uniwersytetów w Grodnie

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Wstęp. Zachowanie i poprawa stanu zdrowia młodzieży jest jednym z priorytetów białoruskiego państwa.

Cel. Określenie poszczególnych aspektów trybu życia studentów i czynników zdrowotnych.

Materiał i metody. Przeanalizowano odpowiedzi kwestionariuszowe 350 studentów Uniwersytetu Medycznego i Uniwersytetu im. Janki Kupala w Grodnie. Badanie odbywało się od maja do października 2009 roku pod egidą programu badań socjologicznych «Zdrowie studentów» prowadzonego w różnych regionach Białorusi i Rosji. Badano samoocenę i stosunek do stanu zdrowia, aspekty żywienia, aktywność fizyczną, aspekty psychologiczne, zachowania w stosunku do substancji psychoaktywnych, seksu, pomocy medycznej, środków zapobiegawczych i służby zdrowia.

Wyniki. Jedynie 34,9% studentów oceniało swe zdrowie jako «dobre». Większość oceniała swe zdrowie jako «całkiem dobre». Ponad połowa studentów uznała dobre zdrowie jako priorytet w osiągnięciu sukcesu w życiu. Jednocześnie, według opinii studentów, ich własne starania są najważniejsze dla dobrego zdrowia. Większość (87%) studentów uważała, że dobrze dbają o zdrowie. W co piątym przypadku troska o zdrowie spowodowana jest jego pogorszeniem. Pomimo pozytywnego stosunku do zdrowia badania wykazały wysoki stopień występowania żywieniowych czynników ryzyka; 22,8% studentów paliło papierosy. Wykazano częste spożywanie piwa: 17,1% młodych kobiet i 47,9% młodych mężczyzn przyznało się do częstego picia piwa. Około 7,1% studentów próbowało narkotyków; 18,6% ma znajomych zażywających narkotyki. Jedynie 9,5% było codziennie aktywnych fizycznie. Mimo dużego zapotrzebowania na informacje zdrowotne, wśród studentów zaobserwowano niski poziom wiedzy medycznej i dotyczącej systemu służby zdrowia. W wielu aspektach wykazano znaczące różnice związane z płcią badanych.

Wnioski. Wyniki badań pozwoliły ustalić kierunki działań zapobiegawczych kształtujących zachowania prozdrowotne studentów uniwersytetów w Grodnie.

Słowa kluczowe: studenci, zdrowie, tryb życia, czynniki ryzyka, środki zapobiegawcze

Introduction. Preservation and strengthening of youth's health is one of the state priorities in the Republic of Belarus.

Aim. To reveal peculiarities of students' way of life and health factors.

Material & method. The survey answers of 350 students of Grodno State Medical University and Yanka Kupala Grodno State University questionnaire were analyzed. The students were surveyed in May-October of 2009 under the program of a sociological research «Health of students» organized in different regions of Belarus and Russia (the head was professor I.V. Zhuravlyova). Self-estimations of health and the attitude to it, factors of nutrition, physical activity, emotional background, behavior in relation to psychoactive substances, sexual behavior, behavior of students in relation to medical aid, preventive measures, the relation to health services were studied.

Results. Only 34.9% of the students estimated their own health as «good». The majority (54.4%) of students considered their health as «satisfactory». More than a half of the students considered good health as a priority to achieve success in life. Simultaneously, according to the students' opinion, their own efforts were the most significant for their health status. The majority (87%) of the students considered that they took care of their health. In every fifth case self-health care was caused by its deterioration. Despite the positive relation to health, high prevalence of risk factors in relation to nutrition was revealed; 22.8% of the students smoked. The problem of the frequent use of beer was especially manifested: 17.1% of young women and 47.9% of young men answered that they used beer often. About 7.1% of the students tried drugs; 18.6% had acquaintances that used drugs. Only 9.5% were engaged daily in physical activity. Despite a high need for health-related information, low medical activity and insufficient knowledge about public health services system as a whole was revealed among the students. The expressed gender distinctions on a number of factors were significant.

Conclusion. The study results allowed to allocate directions of preventive measures for the formation of health-oriented behaviors in students of Grodno universities.

Key words: students, health, way of life, risk factors, preventive measures

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Introduction

Preservation and strengthening of youth health is one of the state priorities in the Republic of Belarus.

Demographic forecasts are unfavorable: ageing of the population and the nation extinction will be proceeding [1]. Deformation of the population age structure proceeds: the number of children under 15 years of age has decreased by more than 312.7 thousand people between 2000-2007 [2].

Therefore the behavior directed towards the support of the population health and especially health of youth becomes increasingly important on the agenda of the state social policy [3]. Conditions favorable for maintenance and strengthening of health of youth are created in Belarus. An especially significant measure is the statement of the National Program of Demographic Safety of the Republic of Belarus prepared between 2007-2010 [4].

This social policy application is restricted by financial problems of socially significant branches, and also social-cultural factors. Thus, along with the separate data about favorable tendencies in the Belarussian population's health-related behavior [5], socially-behavioral factors of irresponsible health behaviors are still popular among youth and especially in teenage environment. The research of experts of Byelarussian State University Center of the sociological and political studies on 1500 pupils of various types of educational institutions of Belarus revealed that the youth's way of life in an overwhelming majority is not health-oriented [6]. The percentage of active consumers of nicotine and alcohol increases among teenagers, which, undoubtedly, leads to deterioration of the whole generation's health at present and threatens health of the whole nation in the future [7]. Actual medical-social problems are the problems of reproductive [8; 9] and mental health of Belarussian youth. Therefore, mental illnesses which interconnect with the increase of consumption of alcohol and drugs are the principal cause of suicides among teenagers [10].

Aim

To reveal peculiarities of students' way of life and health factors.

Materials and methods

The survey answers of 350 students of Grodno State Medical University and Yanka Kupala Grodno State University questionnaire were analyzed. The students were surveyed in May-October of 2009 under the program of a sociological research «Health of students» organized in different regions of Belarus and Russia (the head was professor I.V. Zhuravlyova). Self-estimations of health and the attitude to it, factors

of nutrition, physical activity, emotional background, behavior in relation to psychoactive substances, sexual behavior, behavior of students in relation to medical aid, preventive measures, the relation to health services were studied.

Results

The sample included 121 young men (35.8%) and 217 young women (64.2%), students of the full-time daily training (including 67.5% – the students trained on a budgetary basis). The greatest percentage of the subjects was aged 18-20 years (45.3%) and 21-22 years (43.8%). About 9.5% of the students were aged 23-35 years, 1.5% – 26-30 years. About 29.6% of the subjects studied a humanitarian specialty, 26.3% – a specialty of technical profile, 44.1% – a medical natural-scientific specialty. About 37.6% of the surveyed students attended 1-2 courses of study, 37% – 3-4 courses, 25.4% – 5-6 courses. An overwhelming majority (79.6%) assigned themselves to the group with the income level of less than 1 million Belarus roubles (less than 300 US dollars) per month per person. About 19.8% combined study with work at the moment of the survey.

Peculiarities of students' self-estimations of health and care about it

Only 34.9% (31.8% of young women and 40.5% of young men) estimated their own health as „good”. The majority (54.4%) of students considered their health as satisfactory (57.1% of women and 49.6% of men). Almost 6.5% did not give an answer (identical percentage of young men and women). 4.1% (4.6% of young women and 3.3% of young men) considered own health as bad.

The majority of students (39.3%; or 40.6% of women and 37.2% of men) specified that their own efforts were the most significant for their health status. About 26.3% considered environment as important (24% of women and 30.6% of men), 33.5% – heredity (37.7% of women and 25.6% of men). 6.5% of the students (7.9% of women and 4.2% of men) placed quality of health services as first on the hierarchy of importance.

An overwhelming majority (87%; respectively 92.2% of women and 77.7% of men) answered that they cared about their own health. About 11.5% (6.9% of women and 19.8% of men) specified that they did not care about health; 1.5% did not answer the question.

The greatest percentage (33.4% of the subjects) noticed that their health care was caused by the desire to be physically stronger (26.7% of women and 45.5% of men). About 20.7% specified that their self-health care was caused by its deterioration (the second

place on the frequency of answers; 23% of women and 16.5% of men). Almost 15.7% of the students answered that they cared about their health because of their education (15.2% of women and 16.5% of men). Every tenth subject (10.1%) connected care of health with the influence of medical information (14.3% of women and 2.5% of men). About 5.6% – with the influence and the example of surrounding people (6.9% of women and 3.3% of men), 2.1% – with the requirements of family and friends (3.2% of women, all men). About 3.6% of the subjects specified other reasons of care about health, among which were: «To be young and healthy, instead of old and sick», «To have healthy children», «Live long», «To see great-grandchildren», «To fully enjoy life, to live high-quality life», «Because it is fashionable», «Desire to feel good», «To longer remain physically strong».

Insufficient care about health the students connected first of all with a shortage of will power or a shortage of time (table I).

Table I. Reasons of insufficient care about health

Reasons	women	men	Total
Shortage of will power	16.1%	9.1%	13.6%
Shortage of time	13.4%	10.7%	12.4%
Desire not to limit themselves	1.8%	13.2%	5.9%
Absence of conditions	5.5%	3.3%	4.7%
Absence of necessities to care about health	2.3%	9.1%	4.7%
Because no care guarantees good health	3.2%	6.6%	4.4%
Because they did not think of it	4.6%	0.8%	3.3%

Only a few subjects answered that they did not know how to care about health (the answer of a woman), and also specified other reasons („Laziness” – a woman, «Medications are expensive, and not enough money» – a man).

An overwhelming majority: 91.7% of women and 83.5% of men specified that a person should always care about health. There were other variants of the answer much less frequent: «Only when one is ill » – 2.1% (1.4% of women and 3.3% of men); «Only after reaching a certain age» – 1.8% (1.4% of women and 2.5% of men), «Yes, but without fanaticism», „From time to time” – individual answers. About 5.6% (3.7% of women and 9.1% of men) did not give an answer.

Approximately 54.9% of women and 45.4% of men considered that health first of all promotes an achievement of vital success. The second place on the frequency of answers was occupied with a variant «force of character» (49.1% of the subjects; 54.9% of women and 38.9% of men). About 43.5% specified abilities, talent (44.2% of women and 42.1% of men). More than 42.6% specified good luck, favorable circumstances (41.5% of women and 44.6% of men); 38.5% - education (36.4% of women and 42.1% of

men); 31.1% – material prosperity (30% of women and 33.1% of men); 19.8% – support of relatives and family (20.7% of women and 18.2% of men).

The analysis of the student' health-oriented behaviors showed that about one third treat nutrition irresponsibly (31.1% answered they «do not limit themselves» in relation to food, including 19.9% of women and 51.2% of men). About 40.5% of the students avoided poor-quality products, 26.9% tried not to eat late at night, 15.4% limited the number of meals, 9.2% avoided spicy food, 7.8% avoided farinaceous food, 7.2% avoided sweets, a small percentage of women reported: «I eat vegetables», «I avoid fast-food». The students marked also «I avoid fat», one student specified that «it all depends on the amount of money».

Less than 75% of the students paid attention to unsafe additives content: one fourth never checked it (16.1% of women and 42.1% of men), about 1.5% did not know anything about such additives. Almost 27.8% specified that they checked it often, 45% – rarely, from time to time. About a half of the students were interested in caloric value of products: often – 28.4% (37.3% of women and 12.4% of men), sometimes - 33.4%. More than 36% never checked it (25.3% of women and 57% of men), about 1.5% did not know anything about it. Shelf lives of products caused interest of the majority of students: about 72.2% checked the shelf lives often (the percentage of women considerably exceeded the percentage of men: 80.6% vs. 57%), sometimes – 22%. A little over a half of the subjects used a water-purifying filter at home (58.1% of women and 53.7% of men).

About 22.8% of the respondents (15.7% of women-students and 35.5% of men-students) smoked. The age of the smoking initiation in women was between 10 to 22 years of age, in men – between 6 (2 respondents) and 23 years of age. The greatest number of smoking students began smoking at the age of 15-18 years (the Moda noted 17 years).

Beer was the most often used alcoholic drink among the students. They specified dry wines and champagne as seldom-used drinks: an overwhelming majority (78.4%) of the subjects used them seldom, 8.3% did not use them at all. The percentages of students not using hard liquor and of those using it appeared almost equal (about 43%). Students seldom used house wines, tinctures (rarely – 50.9%, not at all – 34.6%). At the same time, a part of the surveyed specified they often used the following kinds of drinks: about 8% often drank dry wines; 3% often drank strong spirits (0.5% of women and 7.8% of men). Fortified wines appeared a unique kind of spirits on the frequent use of which there was no answer. More than a half (55.3%) of the students specified that they did not drink fortified wines at all; 31.7% used them seldom.

About 7.1% (9.9% of men and 5.5% of women) specified that they ever tried drugs; 2.7% (4.1% of men and 1.8% of women) did not answer the question. Only 2 persons – one man and one woman (less than 1%) positively answered the question on the use of drugs at the moment of survey; 1.5% did not answer the question. At the same time, 18.6%–21.5% of men and 17.1% of women – confirmed they had acquaintances using drugs; 15.1% chose not to answer.

Only 9.5% were engaged in physical activity daily (men a little more often – 13.2% vs. 7.4% of women), more – 34.6% (without gender distinctions) – are frequent. More than a half (51.8%) answered: „sometimes”, and 4.1% – „never”.

Every tenth (10.1%) of the subjects (without gender distinctions) never quarreled with associates. At the same time, only 2.7% (6.6% of men and 0.5% of women) never registered negative emotions. Only 1.5% noted daily conflicts, 13.9% – frequent ones. Daily negative emotions were manifested by 5.9%, frequent – 32.8% (21.5% of men and 39.2% of women). Only 3.6% were in a bad mood daily (5.8% of men and 2.3% of women), 16.9% – frequently. Approximately 63.3% were in a good mood often, 24% – daily. There was no answer „never” to a question on how often the students were in a good mood; only 1 person never experienced positive emotions. However, only 1.5% of the students never were in a bad mood. About 37.6% of the students, without gender distinctions, felt daily positive emotions, 51.5% felt them often.

About 9.8% of the students – every tenth – did not independently try to receive the information on health-oriented questions. The range of questions which students searched for the information concerning health and its preservation showed that as a whole the aspect of eutrophy (healthy food) appeared the most popular. In the second place (52.8%) – psychology – (59.9% of women and 39.7% of men accordingly) and a healthy way of life (47.3%; women – 52.1%, men – 38.8%). The third place was shared by the information on health risk factors (35.4%, no gender distinctions), in women – about stress prevention (women – 40.5%, men – 13.1%), in young men - how to get rid of bad habits (20.5% of women and 30.7% of men). Less popular information – on improving gymnastic skills (women – 27.1%, men – 11.6%), on prevention of cardiovascular diseases (16.7%, no gender distinctions), on protection against adverse ecological factors (14.7% of women and 18.3% of men), about health-friendly building materials (8.2% of women and 13.2% of men).

About 47.9% of the students (53.9% of women and 37.2% of men) answered that additional information for health improvement is necessary for them. More than a half (57.1%) of the students, both men and

women, answered that in their high school there was a subject or a special course on health problems. Almost a quarter (23.1%) stated that such a subject was not taught. Every fifth did not give an answer.

One of the indicators of health status is the frequency of getting a cold. Only about 5% of the students (6.9% of women and 2.5% of men) noticed that they caught a cold 6-8 times a year. The majority (74.9%) experienced an acute respiratory disease 1-2 times a year, 14.2% were ill 3-5 times a year; the percentage of women (17.1%) a little exceeded the percentage of men (9.1%).

The majority of women (46.5%) visited a doctor only when feeling bad for several days. Men visited a doctor only in a case of serious disease symptoms (a variant «only in case of serious illness» was chosen by 28.1% of women and 34.7% of men). About 15.7% of the students did not see a doctor of their own initiative (12.4% of women and 21.5% of men), but only when they had to undergo a periodic obligatory examination. Almost every tenth, without gender distinctions, saw a doctor only in case of injury (sick-list). Only 3.3% sought medical aid at the slightest indisposition (4.1% of women and 1.7% of men); about 1.2% never see a doctor.

About 7% of the surveyed did not undertake any measures of medical prevention. The majority (72.4% of the surveyed students of Grodno) mentioned taking vitamins during the winter-spring period (78.3% of women and 62.8% of men). About 43.8% took measures of preventive maintenance in a flu epidemic (48.5% of women and 37.1% of men), 15.4% of the students independently see a doctor for routine examinations (among women – every fourth-fifth, among men – only 5%), about 21.1% (29.6% of women and 22.4% of men) took measures of secondary and tertiary preventive maintenance (prevention of an aggravation of chronic disease). About 4% of the students added: «I use auto-training», «I accept drugs for my immune system», „I am immune”, «I am engaged in track and field athletics», «I use a condom».

The system of obligatory medical insurance (OMI) is not introduced in the Republic of Belarus. Therefore it appeared surprising that 14.8% positively answered the question on the presence of the insurance policy. The given fact testifies to ignorance of students as to the organization of public health services in the country. At the same time, only 10.4% of the students had a voluntary medical insurance policy.

Almost 31.7% of the students did not seek free medical aid within the last year (every fourth woman and almost a half of men). At the same time, 34% of the students (women – 41.5%, men – 20.7%) paid for a private visit to a doctor. Almost 22% answered

negatively about the satisfaction with free medical aid. Gender distinctions were not statistically significant. The reasons of discontent with free medical aid appeared as follows: (table II).

Table II. The reasons of discontent with free medical aid

Reasons	Percentage of students
Big turns	69.6%
Operating mode of doctors is inefficient	29.6%
Low skill level of doctors	24%
Because doctors are inattentive to patients	23.7%
Because there is no possibility to register to the necessary expert/ cannot choose the local therapist at will/ or because the necessary doctor is often not present	21%
Because the medical-preventive organization is far from home	6.9%
Because one cannot always have the doctor pay a house call	6.6%

The majority of opinions noted by the students at open alternative „other”, concerned insufficient material equipment of public health services: «the State gives not enough attention to equipment», «Shortage of preparations for qualitative treatment», «Only domestic preparations», «There are no medications», «There is no modern equipment», «Impossibility of having a thorough examination».

Throughout 2008 (the previous year for data gathering) about 34% of the students used paid medical aid. At the same time, only 15.2% named services they received. The majority (about 7%) underwent diagnostic procedures. 6.5% paid for the services of the dentist; nearly 1% – for non-conventional methods of treatment (acupuncture); nearly 1% paid for the issue of a health book, for a driver's medical board.

In spite of the fact that every sixth student used paid medical aid in the last year, only 69.5% of the students were satisfied with it (28.7% – completely. 40.8% – partly). Approximately 5.6% were not satisfied. The others either did not answer the question or chose an alternative «difficult to say».

The medical aid expenses of the students in 2008 revealed no statistically significant gender distinctions and reached less than 200 US dollars in the majority.

Almost two thirds (69.5%) of the surveyed students had sexual relations (65.5% of women and 76% of men). About 26.9% of the students answered the question negatively. Practically everyone leading sexual life, both men and women, positively answered the question whether they use contraceptives. The majority used condoms, 9% – oral contraceptives regularly (some women – in emergency), a small part used vaginal diaphragms, a physiological contraception method, interrupted sexual intercourse. Among those

who did not use contraceptives the majority answered that they «were not sure of it». „did not want it”. „there was none”. Individual answers: «I wish to give birth to a child», „I do not know”, «It is harmful», «It is inconvenient in use».

Approximately 29.3% of the students (every third woman and every fourth man) required information on the improvement of sexual health. Less than a half of women and hardly more than a half of men answered that they did not require such information. Every fifth did not answer.

Discussion

More than a half (51.5%) of the students considered health to promote achievement of success in life first of all. Hence it is possible to assert that the health-oriented behavior is socially approved in the students' environment. Only 1.8% of the students (2.3% of women and 0.8% of men) considered that «any success is a gift of destiny, and it does not depend on the person». Obviously the given result manifested the importance of a successful life for the students.

The majority of the students (88.8%) specified that a person should always take care of their health. Despite positive manifestations, behavior of students in health sphere was not safe, especially – of men. Men estimated their health as good, women – more often as satisfactory. About one third of the students had an irresponsible attitude to nutrition, every fifth – smoked, more than 95% experienced alcohol use, about 18.6% had acquaintances using drugs.

The behavior of students in the field of nutrition had especially strongly pronounced gender distinctions. Young men treated food more irresponsibly: more often than 2 times they «do not limit food», more often than 2 times they avoided poor-quality products (71.9% of women and 33.1% of men). Tried not to eat late at night – 38.2% of women and only 6.4% of men. Avoided spicy food – 12% of women and 4.1% of men, farinaceous food – 11.5% of women and less than 1% of men, sweets – 10.2% of women and 1.7% of men.

Frequency and heaviness of smoking was more expressed in men. About 16.6% answered that they smoked fewer than 10 cigarettes a day, including 13.8% of women and 21.5% of men. About 5.6% smoked 10-20 cigarettes (1.8% of women and 12.4% of men). and less than 1% smoked more than 20 cigarettes a day (men only).

The percentage of students considering that they often drank beer appeared maximum in comparison with other kinds of alcoholic drinks and made 28.1% of the subjects. Simultaneously, the percentage of students never using beer appeared minimum in comparison with other kinds of alcoholic drinks (18.6%). It is necessary to notice that the problem

of the frequent use of beer especially concerns men: women answered that they often used beer only in 17.1% of cases, whereas men – in 47.9%.

Physical activity of the students can be characterized as moderated without gender distinctions: only every tenth subject was engaged in daily physical activity.

Good mood – a distinctive line of students. The emotional background of students had no strongly pronounced gender distinctions: two thirds happened to often be in a good mood, every tenth – never quarreled with associates. Only 38.7% of the students noted negative emotions often or daily while positive emotions often or daily were manifested by 89.1% of the subjects.

The behavior of students, especially men, in relation to health prevention appeared insufficient. The percentage of men not trying to obtain health-related information exceeded the percentage of women by 4 times (19% vs. 4.6%). The aspect of healthy food appeared the most popular. At the detailed analysis it was found out that the prevalence of a given variant of an answer was caused by a high percentage of the women who chose it (73.8% of women and 29.8% of men). Men most often chose the answer «about dialogue psychology».

The majority of women (46.5%) saw a doctor when they felt bad for several days. Men – only in a case of serious disease symptoms. About 15.7% of the students did not visit a doctor of their own initiative.

The majority of students (69.6%) are dissatisfied with the big turns in medical institutions; about 29.6% mentioned inconvenient operating mode of doctors. Nevertheless, throughout 2008 of previous data gathering about one third of the students used paid medical aid. We noted a discrepancy between specifications of the kinds of paid medical services received last year (about 15.2%) and those students (48.6%) who specified the concrete sum of payment for medical aid. The given fact, in our opinion, can be explained by the presence of informal „shadow” payments (direct payments to a doctor).

Conclusions

The behavior of students in health sphere mismatches its positive manifestations. Nevertheless, the results of our research show that the requirement for health is highly significant for students. It can be treated as the beginning of a positive tendency. Strengthening the stereotype of health value, working out educational programs of steady motivation on health care with the wide use of the possibilities of educational institutions of all types is necessary for the purpose of increasing it. It is necessary to note the considerable role of mass media in the formation of public opinion on the prestige of health and condemnation of psychoactive substances, informing the population on the consequences of an unhealthy way of life.

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