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EXCUSES IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION MADE BY PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS OF FOURTH AND FIFTH CLASS

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ABSTRACT

Researches show that children are mostly active at gym/sport in the school. So it is extremely important that they participate in physical education and aren't making excuses or aren't passive. Excuses for physical education were in the Slovenian area already a subject to a number of researches; however all deal with pupils in third triad and/or high school pupils. This research is the first of its kind dealing with younger pupils. Despite the fact that participation in physical education is a duty and right of every pupil, some pupils in physical education do not want to participate. Therefore, we wanted to find out how much and in what way the pupils of fourth and fifth class are making excuses for physical education. In the sample 319 pupils of fourth and fifth class were included. We found that absences of school children were within the expected range, because most children aren't long-term ill. Young pupils are expected to make excuses less often than older pupils, because the need for physical movement in this period is strongly expressed. When pupils excuse, this is most often due to illness or because of unsuitable premises and lack of time for personal hygiene after hours of physical education. Pupils in the case of non-participation in physical education often tell teacher the real reason, but often also bring an apology from parents. When pupils don't participate in physical education, they mainly observe it; less frequently the teacher finds another occupation for them.

Keywords: importance of movement, amount of physical/sports activities, participation in physical education, reasons for excuses

INTRODUCTION

Physical/sporting activity is extremely important for a child. Here we include activities both leisure and at work, as well as activities with intention reaching goal of everyday important and planned activities (e.g. travel to school). This type of gym is planned for all types of pupil's body muscles movements; the result is higher power consumption than

in resting. Body exercise is an intentional physical/sporting activity that is structured and is aimed building or improving one's health (Završnik & Pišot, 2005; Mutrie, 2005, in Pišot, Kropej & Volmut, 2006; Caspersen, Powell & Christensen, 1985). Regular physical/sporting activity is decreasing illness rate and mortality from chronic non-contagious diseases, has a positive effect on the levels of body fat and body weight, satisfaction with physical appearance, self-esteem, self-confidence, autonomy, better cognitive performance, better attention, social interaction, social development skills, emotional development of the child, the moral development of the child, reduces the risk of developing high-risk behaviors (smoking, alcohol, drugs), develops a healthy, active lifestyle (Haug, 2008; Planinšec & Fošnarič, 2006; Shephard, 1997; Sibley & Etnier, 2003; Brettschneider & Naul, 2004; Ewing, Gano-Overway, Branta & Seefeldt, 2002; Berčič, 2010; Fras, 2005; Goran, Reynolds & Lindquist, 1999; Boreham & Riddoch, 2001).

The amount and type of physical/sport activities necessary for maintaining good health is still the subject of many researches. In particular, there is a problem in defining the amount and type of children's physical/sport activities, since physical/sports activity for children is different than for adults. The children's physical/sports activities can also be considered as a spontaneous game, but they aren't for adults. Thus, some recommend 20–30 minutes of moderate intensive activity at least 3 times a week (Physical activity and health, 1996; Sallis & Patrick, 1994), the second 30 minutes of moderate activity at least 5 times a week (American Heart Association, 2005; Konec Juričič & Podkrajšek, 2007), 30 minutes of moderate activity a day (Roberts, Tynjala & Komkov, 2004), as well as 60 minutes or more of daily physical/sports activity to reach moderate to high intensity (Strong, Malina, Blinmke, Daniels & Dishman, 2005; Završnik & Science and Research, 2005). However, there are appropriate physical/sports active only 50% of 11 year old boys and only 33% of 11 year old girls (Bishop, 2007).

Researches shows that children are most active in exercises/sports namely in the school (65%) (Strel, Završnik, Pišot, Zorc & Kropej, 2005), so it is extremely important that children participate in physical education process and do not make excuses or are passive. In the second triad of primary school (4th–6th grade) pupils have 3 hours of physical education weekly, which would at optimum use of timing mean 45 minutes sport activity 3 times weekly. However, researches shows that the effective time hours of physical education are very low, which means that children are active in sports only for about 15 minutes 3 times weekly (taking into account that 50% of children out of the school are not active in physical/sports) (Stemberger & Krpač, 2009). All of this is certainly not enough being able to talk about the positive effects of physical education on the health of children and adolescents.

Pupils have the right and duty to attend POUKU school, which is tailored to its specific characteristics, as defined in the Regulation on the pupils rights and duties in primary school (2004). Pupil may be excused for health reasons from participating in certain class hours and other school activities (article 15 of the Regulation ..., 2004). Pupil must also in the case when excused from participating in a particular class lesson, attend on class and complete tasks that do not threaten his health condition, and carry them out in accordance with the medical service instructions. If a pupil for medical reasons can not perform any tasks, the school must organize alternative activities (article 15 of the Regulation ..., 2004).

PROBLEM

Excuses at the physical education were in Slovenian area subject to a number of research studies (Kovač & Jurak, 2010; Jurak & Kovač, 2011; Kovač & Jurak, 2011; Jurak, Leskošek & Kovač, 2010; Strel, Jurak & Kovač, 2007; Jurak, Kovač & Strel, 2006; Jurak, Kovač, Strel & Lorenci, 2005), but they all dealt with pupils in the third triad and/or high school pupils. This research is the first dealing with younger pupils.

Despite the fact that participation in physical education is a duty and the right of every pupil, some pupils do not want to participate in physical education. Therefore, we wanted to know how much and in what way the pupils of fourth and fifth class excuse them at the physical education.

METHODS

The pupils sample

In the sample 319 pupils were included, of which:

- 254 (79.6%) pupils were from the fourth class
- 65 (20.4%) pupils were from the fifth class
- 148 (46.5%) boys
- 170 (53.5%) girls

MODEL VARIABLES

Teachers questionnaire is a modified questionnaire survey for excuses in elementary school higher grades and middle school (Jurak, Kovač & Strel, 2004a; 2004b). Pupil's questionnaire included seven closed questions and was divided into four themes: (1) basic information, (2) the real reasons for excuses, (3) excuses when there is no justifiable reason and (4) pupil activity during the time, when he is justified to participate in sports practice.

ORGANIZATION OF MEASUREMENT

Data collecting took place during the regular school time in October and November 2012. Pupils meet the questionnaires under the research provider's supervision.

METHODS OF DATA PROCESSING

Data were analyzed with the statistical package SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences inc., Chicago IL, version 18.0). With the subprogram Frequencies we calculated frequencies of individual responses to the questionnaires. For descriptive statistics the

program Descriptives was used. To determine differences between individual measuring groups (boys, girls, pupils of class 4 and 5) we used the program DESCRIPTIVES, sub-program CROSSTABS, and there we used contingency tables and Chi2 test.

RESULTS

Table 1. How many days of last school year have you approximately been absent from classes in all subjects due to health problems?

| | Number of pupils | Valid percentage | Cumulative percentage |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Up to 5 days | 160 | 51.1 | 51.1 |
| 6–10 days | 101 | 32.3 | 83.4 |
| 11–30 days | 39 | 12.5 | 95.8 |
| 31–45 days | 6 | 1.9 | 97.8 |
| 45–60 days | 2 | 0.6 | 98.4 |
| More than 60 days | 5 | 1.6 | 100.0 |

Table 2. How many hours in last school year have you approximately excuse yourself from physical education, but you were present in the school?

| | Number of pupils | Valid percentage | Cumulative percentage |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Nothing | 148 | 47.3 | 47.3 |
| Up to 5 hours | 138 | 44.1 | 91.4 |
| 6–10 hours | 15 | 4.8 | 96.2 |
| 11–20 hours | 9 | 2.9 | 99.0 |
| 21–30 hours | 2 | 0.6 | 99.7 |
| More than 30 hours | 1 | 0.3 | 100.0 |

Table 3. Why do you make excuses or are missing from the physical education?

| The reason of excuse | | Never | Exceptionally | Sometimes | Often | Very often |
|--|---|-------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| | | | (1–2 times a year) | (3–5 times a year) | (6–10 times a year) | (more than 10 times a year) |
| Forgetting sports equipment | N | 144 | 123 | 43 | 3 | 0 |
| | % | 46.0 | 39.3 | 13.7 | 1.0 | 0.0 |
| General sickness | N | 186 | 89 | 27 | 4 | 2 |
| | % | 60.4 | 28.9 | 8.8 | 1.3 | 0.6 |
| Fear of exercise programs which are on the agenda | N | 267 | 29 | 10 | 0 | 2 |
| | % | 86.7 | 9.4 | 3.2 | 0.0 | 0.6 |
| Sports exercises on the agenda are demanding too much effort | N | 265 | 37 | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| | % | 85.5 | 11.9 | 1.9 | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| Not enough time for personal hygiene and adjusting after sports | N | 264 | 28 | 6 | 6 | 2 |
| | % | 86.3 | 9.2 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 0.7 |
| There are no adequate facilities for personal hygiene and adjusting after sports | N | 265 | 23 | 9 | 5 | 7 |
| | % | 85.8 | 7.4 | 2.9 | 1.6 | 2.3 |
| Indisposition to exercise, because others also didn't make gym | N | 276 | 28 | 6 | 0 | 1 |
| | % | 88.7 | 9.0 | 1.9 | 0.0 | 0.3 |
| Not being interesting in actual content | N | 239 | 52 | 16 | 2 | 2 |
| | % | 76.8 | 16.7 | 5.1 | 0.6 | 0.6 |
| Learning other subject | N | 267 | 26 | 8 | 3 | 3 |
| | % | 87.0 | 8.5 | 2.6 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| I don't like the time physical education (first or last hour of day lessons) | N | 267 | 28 | 6 | 4 | 4 |
| | % | 86.4 | 9.1 | 1.9 | 1.3 | 1.3 |
| The teacher behaves inappropriate to me | N | 273 | 25 | 7 | 1 | 4 |
| | % | 88.1 | 8.1 | 2.3 | 0.3 | 1.3 |
| Inadequacy space for physical education | N | 277 | 17 | 9 | 4 | 3 |
| | % | 89.4 | 5.5 | 2.9 | 1.3 | 1.0 |
| Illness | N | 98 | 131 | 68 | 5 | 8 |
| | % | 31.6 | 42.3 | 21.9 | 1.6 | 2.6 |
| Injury | N | 147 | 113 | 38 | 4 | 4 |
| | % | 48.0 | 36.9 | 12.4 | 1.3 | 1.3 |

Table 4. How many times a year do you excuse yourself from physical education, even if you do not have a justifiable reason?

| | Number of pupils | Valid percentage | Cumulative percentage |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Never | 241 | 77.7 | 77.7 |
| 1–2 times a year | 50 | 16.1 | 93.9 |
| 3–5 times a year | 18 | 5.8 | 99.7 |
| 6–10 times a year | 0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| More than 10 times a year | 1 | 0.3 | |

Table 5. What excuse do you use most often when you excuse yourself from taking a gym class but you have no justifiable reason?

| Reason of excuse | | Never | Exceptionally (1–2 times a year) | Sometimes (3–5 times a year) | Frequently (6–10 times a year) | Very often (more than 10 times a year) |
|---|---|--------------|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| I forgot my gym outfit | N | 196 | 76 | 20 | 4 | 9 |
| | % | 64.3 | 24.9 | 6.6 | 1.3 | 3.0 |
| I give a teacher a written excuse from my parents about my medical problems | N | 177 | 84 | 28 | 5 | 12 |
| | % | 57.8 | 27.5 | 9.2 | 1.6 | 3.9 |
| Medical excuse | N | 209 | 68 | 15 | 4 | 6 |
| | % | 69.2 | 22.5 | 5.0 | 1.3 | 2.0 |
| I feel seek | N | 200 | 74 | 19 | 4 | 7 |
| | % | 65.8 | 24.3 | 6.3 | 1.3 | 2.3 |
| I tell the teacher the real reason | N | 124 | 86 | 22 | 18 | 50 |
| | % | 41.3 | 28.7 | 7.3 | 6.0 | 16.7 |
| I skip gym class and I get one unexcused absence | N | 287 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| | % | 95.3 | 3.0 | 0.3 | 0.0 | 1.3 |

Table 6. What do you do during the gym class when you are excused?

| What do you do | | Never | Exceptionally (1–2 times a year) | Sometimes (3–5 times a year) | Often (6–10 times a year) | Very often (more than 10 times a year) |
|---|---|--------------|---|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| After the class starts, I go out of the gym | N | 268 | 13 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| | % | 92.4 | 4.5 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 1.7 |
| I talk in the gym's dressing room | N | 242 | 27 | 11 | 3 | 7 |
| | % | 83.4 | 9.3 | 3.8 | 1.0 | 2.4 |
| I watch gym class | N | 85 | 93 | 27 | 18 | 60 |
| | % | 30.0 | 32.9 | 9.5 | 6.4 | 21.2 |
| I study for another class | N | 247 | 17 | 10 | 4 | 8 |
| | % | 86.4 | 5.9 | 3.5 | 1.4 | 2.8 |
| I do what I want, but I'm in the gym (I don't follow the gym class and I don't study for another class) | N | 264 | 17 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| | % | 91.3 | 5.9 | 1.0 | 0.3 | 1.4 |
| Teacher includes me in exercises as an assistant | N | 128 | 91 | 45 | 12 | 12 |
| | % | 44.4 | 31.6 | 15.6 | 4.2 | 4.2 |
| I learn something for gym class | N | 176 | 55 | 15 | 8 | 30 |
| | % | 62.0 | 19.4 | 5.3 | 2.8 | 10.6 |
| I prepare didactically material (posters, learning sheets, exercise sheets ...) | N | 242 | 26 | 10 | 2 | 5 |
| | % | 84.9 | 9.1 | 3.5 | 0.7 | 1.8 |
| I do different things that teacher tells me to (clearing parts of the gym, picking up the trash on outdoor gym premises ...) | N | 184 | 53 | 27 | 7 | 17 |
| | % | 63.9 | 18.4 | 9.4 | 2.4 | 5.9 |

DISCUSSION

During the school year pupils are absent not just from gym classes but also from other classes. Most often pupils were absent for a whole week of class (about 5 days) or cumulative for about 10 days (83.4%). This coincides with duration of illnesses suffering from cold that don't request long term treatments and long term absence from class. Pupils, that are absent from class for longer times are in minority. In Slovenia in 2006/2007 school year 0.25% of pupils were absent long term (Ložar, 2008). Among preschool children in 2011/2012 school year 0.14% of them were ill for longer time (Ložar, 2012). Yet this data is rather disunited, because the definition for a long term absent pupil is not the same in every research. Because we did not ask the kids about the cause for their long term absence we can only assume that it was because of their illness.

Pupil should attend 105 hours of gym class in one school year. Less than half of pupils never excuses themselves, which means, that they are present at all gym class hours. At the same time, approximately the same percent of pupils excuses themselves from attending gym class up to five times. (this is 4.8% of all hours, when half of the pupils are absent from gym class). There are no differences between genders. Comparison with older pupils (Jurak & Kovač, 2010; Jurak, Kovač, Strel & Starc, 2005; Jurak & Kovač, 2011) shows that younger pupils excuse themselves a little less often than their older coevals. We can find the cause for very low degree of excuses in the fact that gym class is very popular among pupils and in the child's stage of development (Cugmas & Burjak, 2008; Jurak, Kovač & Strel, 2002; Janečko-Goličič, 2012). The need for movement is very expressed in this period and pupils are very interested in everything that is new. They like to play, read and do sport. Thus it is expected that pupils will excuse themselves less in this period because of the characteristics in their stage of development (Meece, 2002, in Škof, 2007).

Two of the most often excuses for being absent from gym class frequently (more than 10 times a year) are illness (2.6%) and inappropriate rooms for personal hygiene after the gym class is finished (2.3%). And the others are following in that order:

- Inappropriate time of gym class (first or last hour of school) – 1.3%
- Inappropriate approach of gym teacher – 1.3%
- Injury – 1.3%
- Studying for another class – 1.0%
- Inappropriate conditions for exercise – 1.0%

If we take into consideration the answer to "how often" (6–10 times a year), then the most often excuse used is "illness", followed by "inappropriate rooms for personal hygiene after the gym class is finished", "injuries", "inappropriate time of gym class" and "not enough time for personal hygiene after gym class".

Among reasons for excuses at gym class up to 5 times a year "illness" prevails, then it is "forgotten gym equipment", "injuries" and "general weakness".

When comparing the results with researches from Jurak and Kovač (2011) and Jurak, Kovač, Strel and Starc (2005) we can see that at younger pupils the illness is also the main reason for not attending gym class. The second most often reason is inappropriate conditions for personal hygiene and not enough time for personal hygiene after gym class.

Probably, an insufficient fund for gym classes for pupils of first and second trimester is the reason for that (Štemberger, 2003; 2005). If there are more rooms for gym classes on school, usually, for younger pupils these classes are held in less appropriate rooms. For pupils, especially for girls ages between 9 and 12 appearances becomes very important. Some authors (Grogan, 1999; Kuhar, 2003) say that not being satisfied with her own appearance is a normal experience for women from age 8 on. In a time of puberty appearance becomes more and more important. Against expectations there are no differences in genders, which means that physical appearance these days is not only important to girls but also to boys (Kuhar, 2002). Elected pupils that are used for this research attend 4th and 5th classes. And during this period classes are mostly held in one classroom and teacher accompanies them to gym class and back to classroom. We can assume that because of that pupils have only short time to change and they have to leave the locker-room quickly and return to classroom, meaning they do not have enough time for personal hygiene after gym class.

Sometimes, pupils excuse themselves from attending gym class even if they have no justifiable reason for that. Most pupils do not excuse themselves without a justifiable reason (77.7%). In that percent the part of girls is much higher (85.4%) then the part of boys (69.7%) ($p = .009$). Results are a little surprising because they show that girls excuse themselves more often then boys. But we have to warn that comparisons with previous researches are not adequate because of the age difference among pupils. We could search the reasons for boys excusing themselves at gym classes more often in differences between on one hand the knowledge and interests in gym classes and the reality of taking this knowledge and interests into consideration on the other hand. During these stages the gym classes are held in gender heterogenic groups in which the exercises are often not demanding enough and are more suitable for girls then boys.

In cases where pupil has no justifiable reason for being excused at gym class, teacher states different excuses that follow in that order:

- I tell the teacher the real reason.
- I get an excuse signed from my parents.
- I say I forgot my gym equipment.
- I say I feel sick.
- I get medical excuse from my doctor.
- I just don't show up at gym class.

Pupils that do not attend gym class and they do not have any medical excuse for that, most of the time tell the teacher the real reason why they do not want to attend gym class. The results are similar to the results of the previous researches, but only in that variable. The second most often excuse is signed excuse from parents. Pupils bring it either after they recovered from real illness or either when they do not want to attend gym class and they ask parents to give them a fake illness excuse (42.4% of pupils brings this kind of excuse at least one time a year). Pupils of 5th grade use this fake excuses more often then pupils of 4th grade ($p = .010$) 45.7% of pupils uses forgotten gym equipment as an excuse at least one time a year, by which it is more often used at pupils that are in fifth grade ($p = .002$). Pupils from 5th grades also use the "I feel sick" excuse more often then pupils from 4th grade ($p = .030$). When asking pupils about what excuses they use to

get excused, 40.8% of pupils told us they bring a fake medical excuse at least one time a year. But we think that these results are not realistic, because there are doubts if the pupils understood the question correctly. As expected the percent of pupils that do not show at gym class at all and do not excuse themselves is the lowest. As we mentioned before because of the way the classes are held from 1st to 5th grade, pupil can not go out or in the classroom or the gym without being noticed, because they are with their teacher all the time.

Pupils occupy time when they are excused from gym differently. Most often activity during this time is watching the gym class (70%). This is opposite of teachers doctrine, because a teacher should find an activity for a pupils that was excused from gym class. According to the Book of regulations about pupil's rights and obligations in elementary school (2004) a pupil should assist the class and perform tasks that do not threaten pupil's health condition. If a pupil can not do any of the tasks, the school must organize a substitute activity for that pupil (article 15 in the Book of regulations about pupil's rights and obligations in elementary school, 2004). Because the gym class does not include only exercises but also theory, a teacher should give adjusted activity to the pupil that was excused. Helping the teacher during exercises is the second most often answer. This help includes preparing the room, requisites, helping judging and so on. Statement "studying for gym class" was misunderstood by the pupils, even if we tried to explain it, because teachers from 1st to 5th grade mostly do not teach theory in gym classes, even if these theories are the base for a good gym class. Even if "Doing activities that teacher told me to do" (like to put in order parts of the gym classroom) is on the 4th place of most frequent answers, the comments and questions from pupils during our research gave us to think that they did not differentiate between "doing activities what teacher told me to do" and "teacher includes me in the activities as his assistant". Namely teachers can not allow a pupil to leave the gym classroom and go out alone without escort. But what makes us concern is the fact that teacher do not think of the gym dressing room as a place where they have no supervision over pupils. Namely 16.6% of pupils did leave the gym classroom and went to the gym dressing room at least once during the gym class.

Comparisons with older pupils show that younger pupils similar like the older pupils mostly just watch during gym class and do not get any other tasks. Learning for other classes is as expected on the last place among answers pupils of 4th and 5th grades gave while this answer is on much higher place among answers that older pupils gave. We think that older pupils sometimes deliberately get excused just so they can prepare themselves for other classes.

CONCLUSION

Because of relatively small sample of results we can not generalize the whole population of 9 and 10 years old children. And because this is the first research made on samples that included younger pupils, we can not compare it with others. We can only compare it with older pupils but these comparisons are not always realistic because of the differences in the development stages of children. Even if the research showed that absence from gym classes is not a problem that would demand special treating it still needs more researches

and attention because the results show that the older are pupils the higher is the absence from gym class making the situation worse.

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OMLUVY Z TĚLESNÉ VÝCHOVY ŽÁKŮ ČTVRTÝCH A PÁTÝCH TŘÍD ZÁKLADNÍ ŠKOLY

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SOUHRN

Výzkumy ukazují, že ve škole jsou děti neaktivnější v tělocvičně – při sportu. Je tedy velmi důležité, aby se účastnily tělesné výchovy, tj. neomlouvaly se a nebyly pasivní. Omluvy z tělesné výchovy již byly na území Slovinska předmětem mnoha výzkumů, nicméně všechny se zabývaly středoškoláky. Tento výzkum je prvním svého druhu zabývající se mladšími žáky. Navzdory faktu, že účast v tělesné výchově je povinností a právem každého žáka, někteří se tělesné výchovy účastnit nechtějí. Proto jsme chtěli zjistit, jak často a jakým způsobem se žáci čtvrtých a pátých tříd omlouvají z tělesné výchovy. Do vzorku bylo zahrnuto 319 žáků čtvrtých a pátých tříd. Zjistili jsme, že absence žáků byla v očekávaném rozsahu, neboť většina dětí nebývá dlouhodobě nemocná. Od mladších žáků jsme očekávali méně omluv než od žáků starších, protože je potřeba tělesného pohybu v tomto období silná. Nejčastějším důvodem absence bývá nemoc, nevyhovující prostory a nedostatek času na osobní hygienu po hodinách tělesné výchovy. V případě neúčasti v tělesné výchově žáci často řeknou učitelů skutečný důvod absence, často také přinesou omluvenku od rodičů. Když se žáci tělesné výchovy neúčastní, většinou ji pozorují; méně často je učitelé zaměstnávají dalšími činnostmi.

Klíčová slova: důležitost pohybu, množství pohybových/sportovních aktivit, účast v tělesné výchově, důvody omluv

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