

Book Review

# Health Awareness and Study Performance in Public Educational Type Sports Schools

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## Introduction

The importance of educating young people about health awareness cannot be overemphasized, especially nowadays when physical inactivity is closely linked to the development of technology and spending time in front of screens (smartphone, tablet, TV). Excessive use of the smartphone leads to lack of physical activity (Elhai, Dvorak, Levine & Hall, 2017; Sung, Chang & Liu, 2016) and is also linked to a higher body mass index and deteriorating health, such as vision loss and musculoskeletal problems (Bell et al., 2014; Kim, S.E., Kim, J.W. & Jee, 2015; Sook & Chun, 2017). According to the World Health Organisation (2018) globally, 81% of adolescents aged 11-17 years were insufficiently physically active in 2010. Adolescent girls were less active than adolescent boys, with 84% vs. 78% not meeting WHO recommendations.

The existing sports school system in Hungary is definitely unique: beside its primary goal to support young athletes, to reach high achievement already in the early stages of life by prioritizing domestic recruitment in various sports, it also grants the completion of the tasks of public education in order to reach academic achievement, an aspect that can be presented as a specific goal too.

From this perspective, the book *Health and Learning in Public Educational Type Sports Schools* by Kovács Karolina Eszter is a novelty, because it is the first research which examines and compares possible differences in the academic performance and health awareness of students in sports schools and traditional secondary schools.

## Review

The book is divided into ten chapters. I am going to present the main ideas, and to highlight what I think is relevant, chapter by chapter.

The first chapter focuses on the importance of health awareness, as it includes the relevant literature on the topic and presents the purposes of the research, which are multi-staged: the first aspect is to outline the characteristics, study effectiveness and health behavior of Hungarian sports schools students as non-study results, and then to compare them with the characteristics of students in traditional, non-sports schools. Because the results of previous researches are ambivalent, another basic aim is to compare the academic and non-academic performance of sports schools and traditional schools. The author hypothesizes that students in sports schools also perform better than students in traditional secondary schools in terms of both non-academic performance (health behavior, coping, anxiety, well-being and spiritual well-being) and academic performance (year-end grades, subjective study effectiveness). On the other hand, another aim of the research is to explore the health behavior of students in sports schools, to examine the effect of the environment in sports schools on students' health behavior and attitudes; all this can be done by comparing the results of the input and output grades, i.e. by comparing the health behaviors of 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Further, the author hypothesizes that in the case of sports schools, students are more likely to come from disadvantaged or cumulatively disadvantaged families and have a worse financial background, so the family background index created on the

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basis of the National Competence Measure is lower compared to students of traditional public education institutions. In addition, the examination of territorial differences is also part of the research based on the comparison of the health behavior of students in sports schools located in different regions. Finally, the aim of the research is to reveal the relationship between academic and non-academic performance factors, i.e. to explore the strength of the relationship between health behavior and academic performance.

In the second chapter, the sports school system is presented, focusing not only on the international perspective but also on the unique public education type sports school system operating in Hungary, and presenting the various factors affecting the system (political, economic, social and technological), the sports school curriculum and pedagogical programs, and the previously acquired knowledge about sports school students (especially regarding their social background).

The third chapter focuses on the multifactorial health awareness, examining the healthy and risky behaviors (smoking, alcohol consumption, substance use, physical condition and sports) prevalent in adolescents (both international and Hungarian); the factors affecting the complex system of healthy behavior and health awareness, including interpersonal (family and social structure, social relationships), intrapersonal (gender, anxiety, stress, coping and resilience, well-being, religiosity and spiritual well-being), and cultural-environmental factors (socio-economic status, place of residence, disadvantage).

In the following chapter, 4<sup>th</sup>, the author synthesizes the literature facts on the relationship between academic and non-academic performance from the perspective of sports, risk behavior, and mental health as non-academic performance indicators. Furthermore, she presents a complex performance model, based on academic and health awareness effectiveness. The model is based on systemic effects, which include society (comprising its social, cultural and economic values, norms and processes), the political system (educational and sports policy) and the media. Next is the role of institutional influences, which implies the territorial location, the structure and resources of the institution and the school climate (school type, leadership, educators, contemporaries). At the top of the model are the individual variables. An explicit embodiment of this is the behavior of the individual, which means attitudes and beliefs, patterns and models, commitment and motivation. One of the most significant underlying factors is the family, the impact of which is unquestionable, both on health and on studies, and factors such as family structure, family values and norms, resources, attitudes of family members, as the model they provide affect performance. All of these are closely related to an individual's experience. The peak of the model is effectiveness, which can best express the current and high school characteristics of the individual's health awareness and academic performance.

The fifth chapter summarizes the author's previous research results prior to the dissertation, through the presentation of three pilot studies; this chapter describes the research itself, its questions and hypotheses, the test battery, and the specifics of the study sample. The design of the sample was carried out from seven regions of Hungary, involving three sports schools and three secondary schools in each region, which was developed by multi-stage stratified sampling. Thus, 3015 people were included in the total sample, of which 1675 were sports school students selected from 24 public education type sports schools and 1340 non-sports school students were selected from 24 traditional public education institutions, covering all grades (9-12).

Beginning with the sixth chapter, the research results of the dissertation are presented. The characteristics of sports school students are illustrated by the following: social background, family background index indicators and territorial differences in the health awareness of sports school students (including subjectively judged health status, subjective fitness status, health awareness index, coping resilience, anxiety, well-being and spiritual well-being). The results show that sports school students are more likely to come from a disadvantaged or multiple handicap family and have a poorer financial background, which is experienced at both regional and county levels.

The seventh chapter measures the health awareness characteristics of sports school and non-sports school students. Overall, in terms of general indicators of non-academic achievement, substance use, frequency of alcohol consumption, heavy drink, cocktail and beer consumption, water consumption, energy drink consumption, alcohol-related entertainment are significantly more common among sports school students, and higher sleep intake is specific to them. The frequency of fast food consumption, as well as the frequency of wine consumption is significantly higher among students of non-sports schools. Regarding the health awareness characteristics of the experimental and control group, an ambivalent picture of health awareness appeared: the higher health awareness of sports school students and the presence of significantly more positive attitudes among them are not clear, as the prevalence of some risky behaviors is higher (e.g., substance abuse, frequency of alcohol consumption). However, in terms of psychological factors (e.g., health awareness, coping resilience, well-being, and spiritual well-being), sports school students are more effective.

The eighth chapter focuses on examining the academic performance of the two groups. Contrary to the assumption, students in traditional public education institutions are characterized by better academic results, either year-end study averages or subjective academic performance indicators or, as an even more objective index, the 10<sup>th</sup> grade data of the 2016 National Competence Survey.

The ninth chapter explores the relationship between health awareness and academic achievement, as the author examined the factors affecting them. In terms of psychological factors, the impact of well-being and spiritual well-being is clearly significant, as above-average well-being and spiritual well-being are positive, while anxiety has a negative impact on academic performance. Regarding health awareness, the impact of sports school institutional membership is significant in itself, but negative, and this is not changed by socio-demographic and psychological indicators either. The impact of competitive sports is also significant, but positive, and it also reinforces the impact of sports school membership even with the inclusion of social background variables, but psychological factors eliminate its significant impact. The mother's tertiary education also has a significant positive effect. The above-average objective financial situation is clearly and continuously negative. In terms of academic performance the author examined the competence of reading comprehension and mathematics: the impact of sports school institutional membership and vocational school membership is significant in itself, but negative, and this is not changed by socio-demographic and psychological indicators either. The effect of gender, type of settlement and the mother's education is also significant throughout, and the objective financial situation above the average is clearly and continuously negative.

Finally, in the tenth chapter, the results of the research are synopsized, and the outlook and limitations of the research are described.

### Conclusion

Although the relevance of sports schools is indisputable, both in terms of educational policy and sports policy, it was not the purpose of specific research to know and map them until now. This research contributes significantly to mapping the operational efficiency of the sports school system introduced in 2012 in Hungary, discovering student characteristics, and comparing them with characteristics among peers at the national level, interpreting regional differences as well. So the research topic fills a gap and is very topical.

To conclude my review, I would like to recommend the book primarily to sports school leaders, teachers and sports psychologists, to get to know their students better; the results of the research can help the basis of prevention, intervention and educational processes, the expansion of its methodology, the creation of good practices. I would recommend it also to parents of athletes, because it can help them understand their children better, maybe help them to choose the right school for their children.

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