



STUDY OF THE NEED FOR SPORTS AND THE HEALTHY LIFESTYLE HABITS OF THE UNWE'S FITNESS GROUPS STUDENTS UNDER THE PANDEMIC CONDITIONS CAUSED BY COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 global pandemic posed a number of problems and challenges to higher education professors and more specifically to the "Physical Education and Sports" professionals in higher education. That is why, we, the fitness lecturers at the UNWE, tried to look for a solution to them. For this purpose, we surveyed first and second-year students enrolled in the university's fitness groups. The survey, conducted through the UNWE's electronic platform, contains 14 questions. 80 students, including 60 women and 20 men, took part in the survey. **The objective** of the study was to determine the students' need for sports and whether they have healthy eating habits and lifestyle. The following **methods** were applied in order to reach the research's objective and tasks: a thorough review of the studies and literature on the topic (survey method). **The results** were processed mathematically and statistically in Excel. The analysis of the results shows that over 90% of the students practise sports more than 2-3 times a week, they know the importance of nutrition for their health and have a basic knowledge of nutrients. The study leads to the following conclusions: male students spend enough time weekly to maintain their good physical shape; not all female students spend enough time practising sports during the week; the lecturers should focus on food hygiene and diet.

Key words: fitness, students, survey, pandemic, opinion

The whole world currently lives under the conditions caused by the global Covid-19 pandemic. The latter managed to affect the entire economic, social, cultural and everyday life. In addition, it posed huge challenges to people of all ages and working in various spheres. These issues and challenges did not go unnoticed in the educational system and the physical education and sports discipline in particular. In this context, the sports professionals in higher education institutions need to find a solution to a number of questions provoked by the current situation, such as: "How to keep our health and the health of our

students?"; "How can we help strengthen the body's natural defences through physical education and sports?"; "What is the students' need for sports activities?"; "Do they have established habits for a healthy lifestyle?"; "Do they know enough about healthy nutrition?" and various other questions to which we are all looking for the right answers.

INTRODUCTION

The number of studies on the topic is not very exhaustive. In a publication, M. Aleksieva and M. Borukova state that "for the first time in modern history, all kinds of students from all kind of universities have switched entirely to distance learning in practical disciplines" (1, our translation). M. Aleksieva also studies the basketball training of master's degree students from the University of Veliko Tarnovo during a state of emergency (2).

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The management of the studying process is particularly important for its implementation and effectiveness, as we all know. According to L. Kasabova, "physical education and sports instructors have an important role in this process and they must have the knowledge and skills to effectively manage the learning and training process." (4, our translation)

Meanwhile, in the context of a global pandemic, it is extremely important to take into account that "the modern urban lifestyle, the scientific and technical advances and the lack of time are the main reasons for the increasing rate of hypodynamia and hypokinesia among young students". "Hypodynamia and hypokinesia are the main causes of decreased motor activity among students, resulting in lower vital parameters, deterioration in health and lower learning abilities". (6). A number of sports professionals believe that "the rational use of physical exercise and sports could be used to improve the health, physical development and physical capacity of our youth and in particular the students". (7, 9)

"The active participation of students from higher education institutions, which do not specialise in sports, is extremely important for their health, their good physical development and the acquisition of qualities and skills necessary for their future professional realisation". (4, our translation). In other words, it is very important and has a preventive role in protecting their physical and mental health. That is why, sports professionals nowadays look for new ways, forms and methods of physical education and sports activities that meet the modern requirements and are able to solve the contemporary challenges ahead of the higher education. (7, our translation).

In addition to intentional efforts to practise sports, students need to make the effort to create an optimal diet which delivers all the necessary nutrients to their body. A healthy lifestyle is also extremely important during a global pandemic. Exercise in combination with an optimal diet results in better health, improved performance and functional capabilities, better self-esteem, strengthening of the will. It also increases the body's resistance to stressful situations and various diseases, helps it adapt faster to different

conditions, which in turn contributes to a greater efficiency in all areas of life. In addition, the combination of exercise with a proper diet leads to the body's increased adaptive capacity. This guarantees an adequate response to all kinds of situations in life.

We defend the theory that the current educational system and the distribution of fitness training materials at the UNWE does not fully cover the students' needs for knowledge in the context of independent training and optimal and healthy nutrition. That is why, we set ourselves the **objective** to find out what is the students' need in terms of training, whether they have established healthy eating habits and whether their lifestyle is healthy.

In order to achieve our **objective** we set ourselves the following **tasks**:

1. To design a questionnaire.
2. To conduct the survey with the UNWE's students who attend the university's "Optional sports – fitness" classes.
3. To process and analyse the data from the survey.
4. To bring up-to-date and adequate conclusions and recommendations for the practices imposed by the pandemic conditions.

METHODOLOGY

In order to reach the objective and the tasks of the research we used the following methods: a thorough review of the existing research on the topic, survey method, mathematical - statistical methods.

The object of the survey is the fitness training in the conditions of global pandemic.

The subject of the research are the surveyed students' knowledge, needs and attitude regarding the fitness training in the UNWE's platform.

The participants in the research are 80 first and second-year students (including 60 women and 20 men) who attend the UNWE's "Optional sports – fitness" classes.

We posted the "Survey - do we practise sports enough and do we have basic knowledge about healthy eating during a pandemic" in the UNWE's online platform. The questionnaire is anonymous and contains 14 questions regarding

the issues we are interested in (**Annex 1**). The results of the study were processed mathematically and statistically in Excel.

RESULTS ANALYSIS

We conducted a survey among first and second-year students, enrolled in the university's "Optional sports – fitness" classes, in order to determine their opinion and attitude towards sports and healthy lifestyle.

The data from the survey shows that 95% of the surveyed students believe that an increase in physical activity would have beneficial effect on their health. This is a high enough percentage to accept the statement that students are very well

informed about the sports' positive impact on their health.

Meanwhile, the answers to the question "Where do you practise sports?" (**Figure 1**) are more diverse. We believe that this result is largely influenced by the current pandemic conditions. Most respondents, 52%, have said that they exercise at home, while 32% do so in the gym. We believe that the low percentage (only 9%) of students practicing sports outdoors is mainly due to the inappropriate conditions (facilities and weather conditions). We also observe a good trend that only 3% of the surveyed students have answered, "I do not practice any sports".

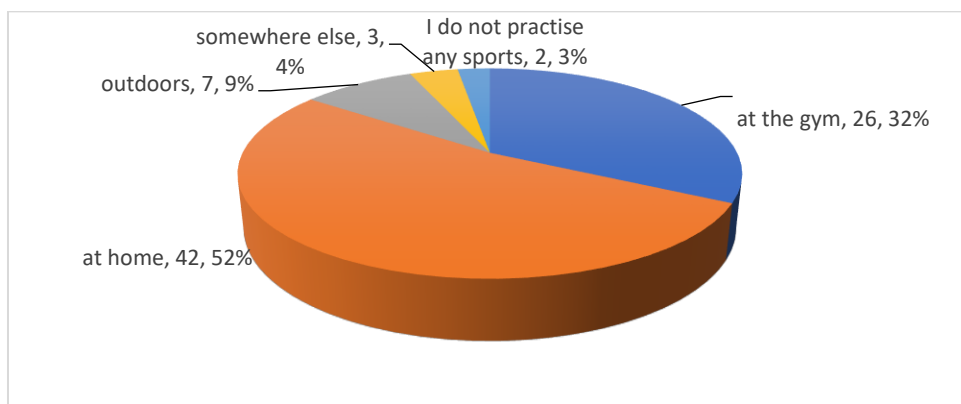


Figure 1. Answers to the question "Where do you exercise?"

When asked, "How often do you exercise?" (**Figure 2**), a total of 49% of the survey's participants have answered 2-3 times per week, while 29% have answered 4-5 times a week. This shows that our students are very well informed

about states such as "overtraining" and "insufficient training". The other three answers would namely lead to such results (every day, 2-3 times a month and more rarely).

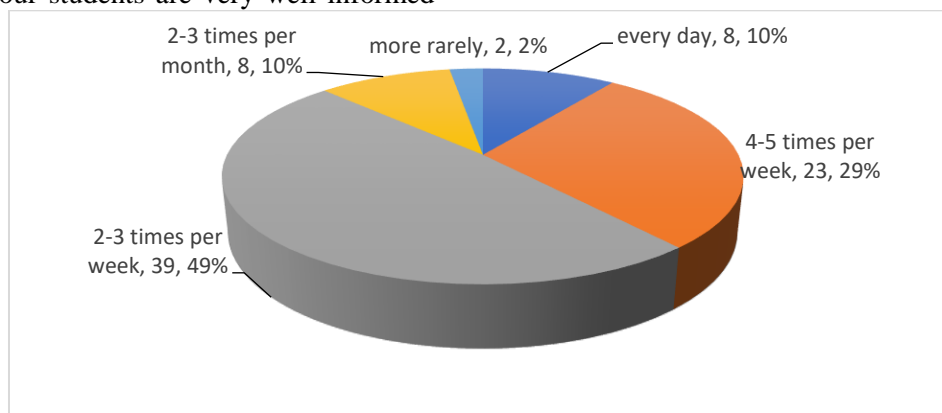


Figure 2. Percentage distribution of the answers to the question "How often do you exercise?"

We noticed a difference in the answers of male and female students (**Figure 3**), which we consider as significant enough to make us focus a

little more on informing our students about the benefits of sports and how often it should be practised in order to have a beneficial effect.

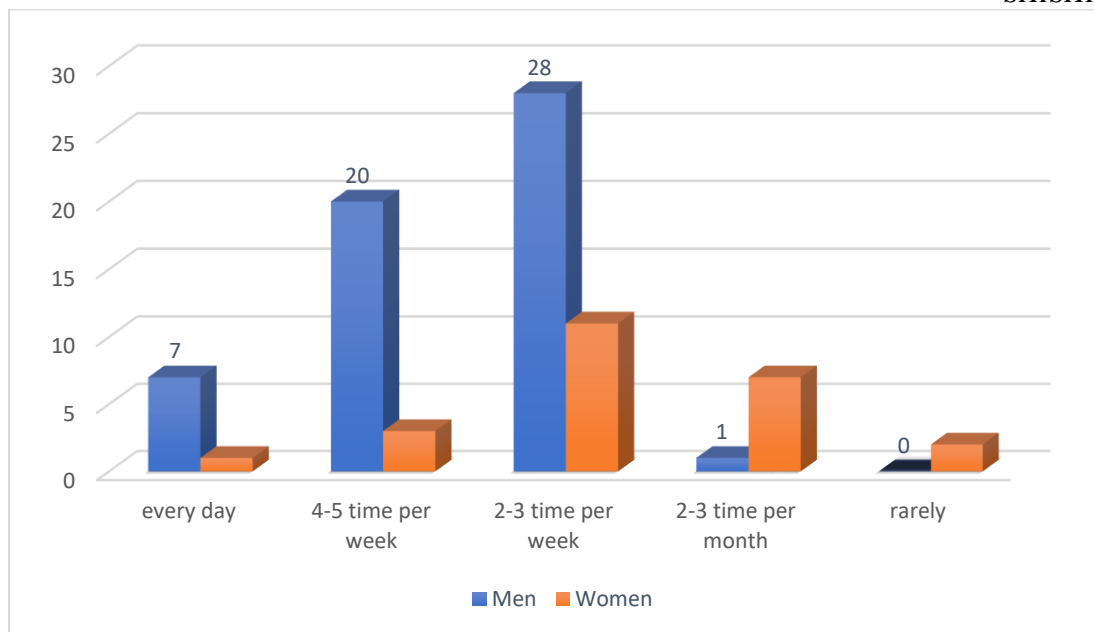


Figure 3. Difference in the answers to the question "How often do you exercise?" for both sexes

"What makes active sports interesting for you?" (Figure 4) is a question of particular interest to us as sports professionals. The large percentage of female students who have answered, "I want to look better" (58%), clearly indicates their motivation. Meanwhile, a significantly lower number of the participants (32%) have voted for

the answer "I want to improve my health". The other possible answers are relatively less popular. These results give us a reason to believe that our educational and training materials should be more detailed and focus more on health and priorities when exercising.

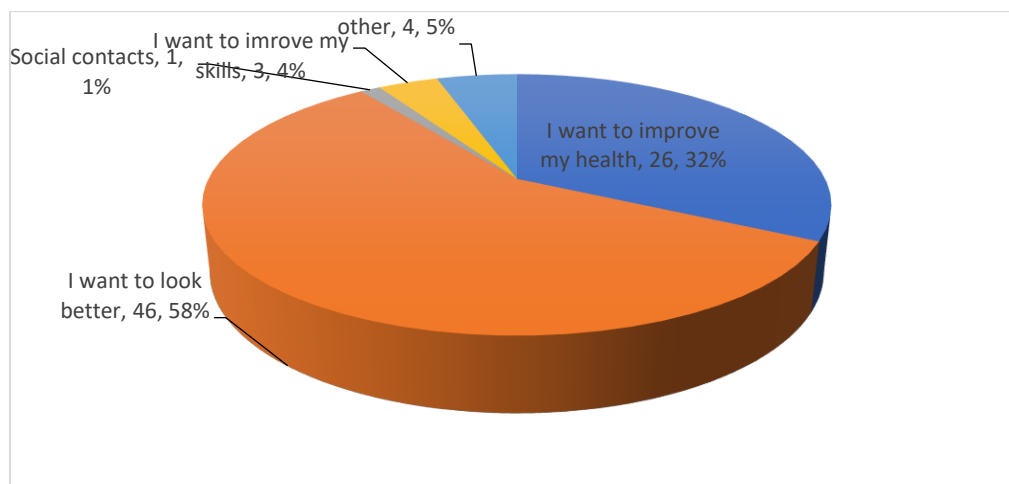


Figure 4. Answers to the question "What makes active sports interesting for you?"

We have taken into account that in addition to its benefits, active sports also carry certain health risks. That is why, we enriched our survey with

the question "In your opinion, are there any health risks in active sports, for instance:"

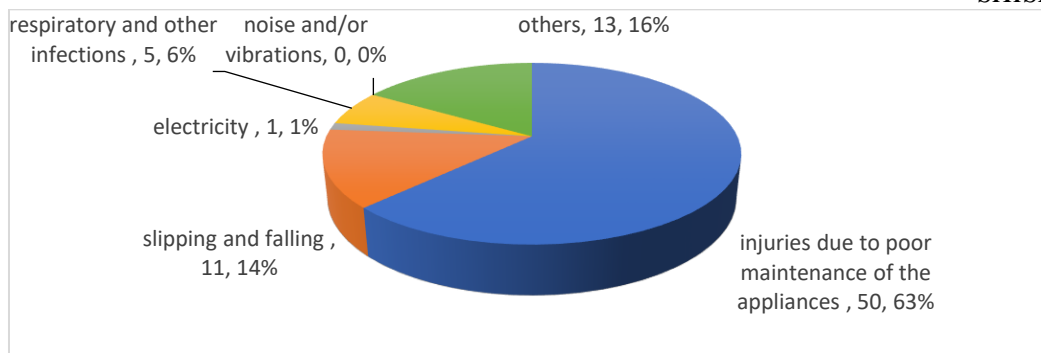


Figure 5. Answers to the question "In your opinion, are there any health risks in active sports, for instance:"

According to the students' answers, the highest risk of active sports are the injuries. The most popular injuries in the students' opinion are those caused by poorly maintained appliances (50 answers or 63% of the participants in the survey). The students have put "other injuries" on the second place and the third most popular answer are injuries from slipping or falling. Taking into account the students' concerns, we are glad that at the UNWE's sports centre "Bonsist" the risks of injuries for our students are almost minimal since our facilities are well-maintained and we are taking care of all kinds of hygiene measures.

In the next part of our survey, we asked a few questions in the context of healthy nutrition and basic knowledge about essential nutrients.

Almost 100% of the participants in our survey have answered positively to the question "Do you believe that a healthy diet is beneficial for your health and lifestyle?". We consider this as a logical answer considering their age and education. However, the students are not so unanimous in their answers to the question "Is your diet healthy and do you think it provides your body with the necessary nutrients?" (**Figure 6.**)

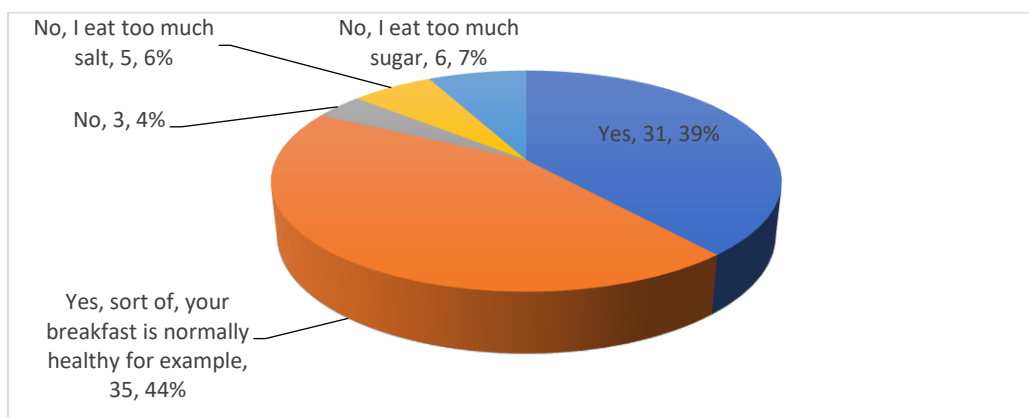


Figure 6. Answers to the question "Is your diet healthy and do you think it provides your body with the necessary nutrients?"

The students' most popular answer (44%) to this question is "sort of", while the second most popular one is the positive answer. The fact that the negative answer's popularity is so low (only 13%) paints an optimistic picture. However, we believe that the university's education and training materials focused on healthy nutrition and healthy eating habits need to be further developed.

Students have given interesting answers to the questions "Are you familiar with the main nutrients and their function in the human body?" (**Figure 7**) and "Do you follow a special diet?" (**Figure 8**). It seems to us that our education materials have helped them receive some basic knowledge about nutrition. However, given how crucial this knowledge is for their health, especially during a pandemic, we believe that we should take some extra time and

make more efforts to make our teaching programme more detailed in terms of food hygiene and diet. Out of the whole survey, the participants give the biggest number of negative answers to these two

questions. We consider that through additional studies and more rigour during the learning process we can help them significantly improve their knowledge.

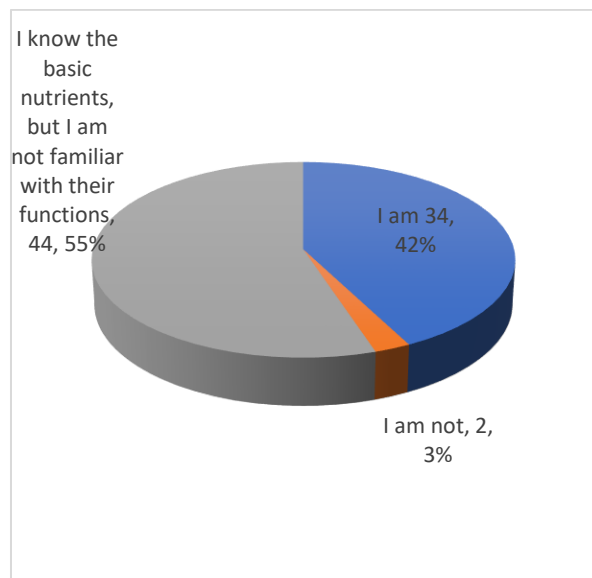


Figure 7.

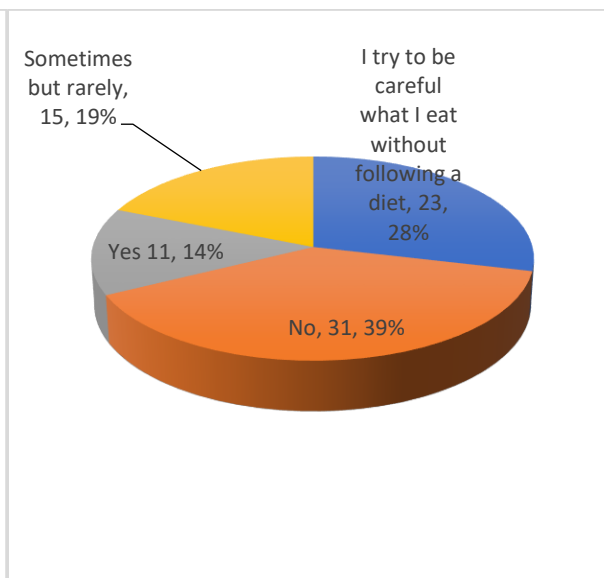


Figure 8. Answers to the

questions "Are you familiar with the main nutrients and their function in the human body?" and "Do you follow a special diet?"

The data from the analysis of our survey provides us with some guidelines on how to optimise the learning process in the UNWE's fitness classes and it may also be useful for the sports instructors and lecturers in other sports disciplines at the UNWE and other universities.

CONCLUSIONS

The answers in our survey lead to the following conclusions:

1. The instructors' and lecturers' work should be aimed at increasing the students' knowledge about the health benefits of sports.
2. Male students spend enough time per week to keep themselves fit. Meanwhile, not all female students spend enough time practising sports during the week.
3. In their classes, instructors and lecturers should focus on food hygiene and nutrition.
4. During every class, lecturers should check and evaluate the students' knowledge about healthy lifestyle, including healthy nutrition.

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Annex 1.

Survey

This survey aims to determine the physical activity and the interest in healthy nutrition of the UNWE's students who are enrolled in the university's optional sports - fitness classes. The survey was inspired by the online classes conducted during the pandemic. Your answers are especially valuable to us and will help us improve the teaching and training materials in the UNWE's fitness classes.

1. Gender

a/ Male b/ Female

2. Year

a/ First b/ Second

3. Do you think that the increased physical activity has a beneficial effect on your health and lifestyle?

a/ Yes b/ No c/ I cannot decide

4. Where do you exercise?

a/ At the gym b/ At home c/ Outdoors d/ Somewhere else e/ I do not practise any sports

5. How often do you exercise?

a/ every day b/ 4-5 times a week c/ 2-3 times a week d/ 2-3 times a month e/ more rarely

6. For how long do you normally exercise?

a/ 1 hour b/ 1-2 hours c/ more than 2 hours d/ less

7. What makes active sports interesting for you?

a/ I want to improve my health b/ I want to look better (weight-wise) c/ Social contacts d/ I want to improve my skills e/ other

8. In your opinion, are there any health risks in active sports, for instance:

a / injuries due to poor maintenance of the appliances b / slipping and falling c / electricity d / respiratory and other infections e / noise and/or vibrations f / others

9. Do you believe that the healthy diet is beneficial for your health and lifestyle?

a/ Yes b/ No c/ I cannot decide

10. Is your diet healthy and do you think that it provides your body with the necessary nutrients?

a / Yes, sort of, your breakfast is normally healthy for example b / No c / No, I eat too much salt d / No, I eat too much sugar

11. Are you familiar with the main nutrients and their function in the human body?

a/ I am b/ I am not c/ I know the basics, but I am not familiar with their functions.

12. Do you follow a special diet?

a/ No b/ Yes, describe it.

13. Do you smoke?

a/ No b/ Yes, for three years c/ Yes, between three and ten years d/ Yes, for more than ten years

14. Do you consume alcohol?

a/ No b/ Yes, in small amounts and/or I am new to it c/ Yes, often