

# RESEARCH INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OF FEMALE STUDENTS, ENROLLED IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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## Introduction

The benefits of regular physical activity for physical health are evident: better and longer life, reduced risks of various diseases, physical and emotional satisfaction (Sallis et al., 1999). Research shows that a lack of physical activity is one of the causes of death in the developed world. Regular physical activity stimulates bone and muscle development, improves posture, coordination and balance while moving, strengthens the cardiovascular system, has a positive effect on the respiratory and digestive systems. Consequently, better health helps build self-confidence and self-esteem (Blair, 1993). The abovementioned benefits of physical activity are especially important for those female students in vocational education whose future jobs will require physical strength and fitness.

Many Lithuanian researchers (Laskienė et al., 2009; Kardelis et al., 2001; Volbekienė et al., 2007) and foreign authors (Gordon-Larsen et al., 2000; Kahn et al., 2008) have found that girls are less physically active than boys of the same age. This negative fact calls for looking for causes and ways of solving this problem.

Individual mental, physical, spiritual and developmental characteristics influence a person's physical activity. These characteristics are also influenced by the economic, social, psychological, genetic and other factors, individual skills and experiences differ greatly therefore it is important to identify those physical activities that students used to engage in schools, how attractive they were and offer such that suit personal characteristics, abilities, disposition, attitudes. Social cognitive, constructivism, social constructivism, self-learning, etc. theories (Brown, 2009) highlight that positive experiences are very importance since they help reveal abilities, gain skills, build healthy habits and stay physically active in the future. If female students' experiences in secondary schools remain unknown it will be difficult for vocational schools to look for effective ways of promoting physical activity. We assume that this research will help create favourable teaching/learning environments, promote physically active lifestyle, find such forms of physical activity that suit students best, develop their sports skills and build long-term habits.

L. Jovaiša (2007) has identified the following elements of students' experiences: knowledge, abilities, skills, attitudes and feelings. All the above are related to learning/teaching environments. These environments may be either conducive to engaging in physical activity or not. Therefore, so as to create positive environments it is necessary to identify female students', enrolled in vocational education, experiences of physical activities as well as barriers to a more physically active lifestyle.

**The aim of the research** is to identify the experiences of physical activity of female students, enrolled in vocational education, their skills and habits and how the benefits of and barriers to physical activity are perceived.

**Tasks:** To find out female students' experiences of physical activity, how they perceive the benefits of and barriers to physical activity.

**Research subject:** female students', enrolled in vocational education, experiences of physical activity.

### **Research objectives:**

1. To identify female students' experiences of physical activity in PE lessons and outside of school hours.
2. To identify the perceived benefits of physical activity.
3. To identify barriers to physical activity.

## Methodology and methods of the empirical research

**Research methods:** scientific literature overview, qualitative research, analysis of open-ended survey data. Qualitative data were collected so as to identify female students', enrolled in vocational education, experiences of physical activity. According to Gall et al. (1996), qualitative research is appropriate for analyzing unexamined phenomena, Yungblut et al., 2012 states that qualitative research reveals adolescent girls' experiences. The survey comprised two open-ended questions: 1) Tell about your experiences of PE lessons, out-of-school physical activities in your free time and with family and friends (sports clubs, schools). How do you feel when you remember that? 2) What motivates you to engage in physical activities or prevents from doing that? Do you regret that you are not physically active?

Doing interpretive content analysis the collected responses were grouped into analytical units of a lower and higher level: a respondent's topic and a local topic (*Subtopic 1 and Subtopic 2, respectively*) and a qualitative content analysis was done (Bitinas et al., 2008b). Research sample: 11 respondents, female students aged 17-20 from Šiauliai Vocational Education and Training Centre, Department of Trade and Business.

### Experiences of physical activity

According to D. G. Myers (2008), learning facilitates a continuous change in human behaviour and is linked to experience. Learning is the process when a student, individually or supported by a teacher, gains new experience which is either repeated or not. Thus the result of repeated experience is a change in habits, attitudes, beliefs.

As it has been mentioned above, many theories highlight the importance of personal experience, and a socio-ecological model helps understand decisions and behaviour affecting factors. Those factors that hinder physical activity are called barriers.

A socio-ecological theory (McLeroy et al., 1988) dealing with various barriers highlights that four types of factors – intrapersonal, personal, environmental and social – play an important role and the most significant ones are social and environmental and have the biggest impact on a person's attitude and behaviour. A socio-ecological model helps understand the impact of these four types of factors on a person's attitude towards physical activity (Gyuresik et al., 2006). This model can be used to design PE programmes, launching initiatives (Yungblut et al., 2012), also to reveal individual and political attitudes towards and decisions on physical activity.

It is stated in scientific literature that a person's attitude towards physical activity depends on his age and gender (Duncan et al., 2004). A gender factor is most evident in sports games (Telama et al., 2002).

Some physical activities are more suitable for girls, others – for boys, still others – for small children or students (Pinel, 2002). Some people are highly motivated to engage in organized sports, others enjoy unorganized, out-of-school physical activity (Kardelis et al., 2001).

Many adolescent girls go to training sessions or workouts in the gym. The research carried out by Pajaujienė et al. (2010) shows that such physical activities that improve fitness, e.g., aerobics or dancing, are most popular among girls (30.5%), the majority of physically active girls do aerobics, go to fitness classes or workout sessions in the gym (62%).

In scientific literature (Colleen et al., 2000), the benefits of physical activity and sports fall into the following four groups:

- *Physical health* – longer and better living, improved muscular strength, endurance and power, healthy bones, prevention of osteoporosis, cardiovascular diseases, obesity, body mass control, normal menstrual cycle, reduced risk of chronic diseases, etc.
- *Psychological and emotional health* – better psychological, mental health, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-empowerment, self-motivation, self-development, personal achievement, improved cognitive performance, stress control, reduced anxiety, stress, depression, better quality of life in old age.
- *Social and cultural wellbeing* – attractive, healthy body, engagement in social activities, community life, social relations with adults and peers, teamwork skills, risky behaviour prevention, academic achievements, variety of prospects.
- *Movement skills* – sports skills, physically active lifestyle, self-development, etc.

Seeking to change negative attitudes towards physical activity students should be informed about its benefits.

The term *barrier* is defined as “something that impedes” (Webster's Dictionary, 1913) when a person faces a challenge and strives to overcome some social, personal, environmental or economic obstacle through specific behaviour while pursuing his goal (Russell et al., 2010).

Some barriers to physical activity are characteristic of women (Robbins et al., 2003). Scientific literature (Werthner et al., 2010) provides the following types of barriers to physical activity:

- **Physical** – diseases, lack of physical competence, fundamental knowledge, sports skills.
- **Psychological** – low self-confidence, lack of self-control, self-esteem, self-efficacy (Malinauskas (2007) study shows that self-efficacy of young basketball and football players is very high), sports skills, knowledge, tiredness, fear, unattractive physical appearance, etc.
- **Time** – much homework, care for younger brothers, sisters, own children, ill parents, attitudes of the family that a girl should spend time at home. The respondents noted that they should be more physically active but have to choose between responsibilities and interests.
- **Interpersonal** – a lack of family support, positive feedback, attitudes of the family that sport is a waste of time, no example/model, fear to have a manlike body, etc.
- **Availability/accessibility** – high costs, no modern sports equipment, bad infrastructure, low quality of services, competence of instructors, discriminating experiences, gender stereotypes, climate.
- **Programmes** – lack of a variety of programmes, groups only for girls, focus on results, competitions, specialisation, strict programmes.

**Topic Variety of physical activity.** Subtopics: in PE lessons, outside of school hours.

**Physical activity in free time.** The respondents said that they were physically active in their free time (“I have been attending football club since primary school and participated in “Ežiogolas” matches”, M2). Basketball, volleyball and football were the most popular games. According to Parker (1984), competitive sports games teach how to break into a foreign territory, require creativity, good memory, allow students to gain skills that they will need in

the future (Hughes, 1999). The respondents noted that they changed a sports club or gym (“In school I played field hockey, did karate. Now I workout in the sports club”, M4; “I went to the gym in my school, I remember, it was very interesting at the beginning but later I got bored”, M6), felt good when nobody saw them and preferred doing workouts in the home (“So now I do workouts in the home, nobody sees me and I feel good”, M7), 7 respondents said they enjoyed jogging (“I go jogging every evening <...>”, M1) (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Variety of physical activity*

TOPIC (global topic)	SUBTOPIC 2 (local topic)	SUBTOPIC 1 (respondent's topic)
VARIETY OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	Physical activity in free-time	Sports (basketball, athletics, football, field hockey, karate, volleyball, dancing, swimming, fast walking)
		Sports club, gym
		Workout in the home
		Jogging
		Cycling
		Outdoor games
		Walking, hiking
	Physical activity in PE lessons	PE lessons

It is likely that jogging was named sport No. 1 because it is most accessible, can be done in any place and requires no special skills (of course, if it suits your fitness level). Cycling (“I remember the days, when I and my friends used to go cycling to the lake in summer”, M2) and playing outdoor games (“<...> I was playing games outside, but attended no sports.” M3) were less popular. One respondent said he liked hiking but did not know the differences between physical activity and sports (“Well, if hiking is sports, I mean hikes, then it is the best thing <...>”, M6).

**Physical activity in PE lessons.** Only one respondent noted that she was physically active in PE lessons (“I felt good in PE lessons <...>”, M8). That allows stating that the respondents' experience in PE lessons was bad.

**Topic The benefits of physical activity.** Subtopics: communication with peers, opportunity to learn, opportunity to play, pride of achievement.

**Communication.** An opportunity to make new friends, socialize, interact and communicate with the peers were identified as the main advantage of physical activity. The majority of the respondents said they liked physical activity because they made new friends (“It is fun to move and find new friends <...>”, M4; “Later I decided to attend athletics, I succeeded in everything I was doing there. I was feeling good. Impressions are also good, I met many new friends there”, M7). Communication was also important (“<...> you can go outside and do some sport with your friends, like running, because it is good for your healthy, instead of staying at home”, M4; “I enjoyed travelling with various people on a specific route”, M6.). It is possible to state that a lack of communication acts as a barrier to physical activity (“I remember when I spent the whole summer doing sport I was very satisfied but one day I got lazy and said ok next day and that was the end”, M6) (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Benefits of physical activity*

TOPIC (global topic)	SUBTOPIC 2 (local topic)	SUBTOPIC 1 (respondent's topic)
BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	Communication	Communication with peers
		Making new friends
	Opportunity to learn	To learn something new
	Opportunity to play	Opportunity to play with friends
	Pride of achievement.	To be proud of achievement



**Opportunity to learn.** Several respondents noted that it was important to gain new skills (“<...> I met many new friends and learned a lot...”, M7; “<...> to learn something new and improve in sports activity, I was always waiting for the next workout, was willingly attending it” M1).

**Opportunity to play.** The respondents valued that benefit (“It is fun to remember days when I had an opportunity to play football <...>”, M1).

**Pride of achievement.** According to the respondents it was not very important (“<...> we were never disappointed even when we won nothing”, M2).

**Topic Barriers to physical activity.** Subtopics: physical, psychological, time management, interpersonal, availability/accessibility.

**Physical barriers.** The respondents said that exercise used to be very strenuous, named various physical pains (“Moreover, I cannot go in for sports because of my back. I can do exercises shown by my doctor only”, M8), they would get tired (likely because of low physical activity) (“<...> you are already tired and cannot think about anything else but bed and sleep”, M1; And after all that I feel tired and don’t want to go in for sports or anything like that”, M3).

**Psychological barriers.** The respondents named a lack of motivation (“<...> sometimes I lack of motivation”, M8) and sports skills in PE lessons as well as unawareness of the benefits of physical activity (“You must have desire and strength. If you don’t want nobody will force you to do that”, M6) (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Barriers to physical activity*

TOPIC (global topic)	SUBTOPIC 2 (local topic)	SUBTOPIC 1 (respondent’s topic)
BARRIERS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	Physical barriers	Traumas (back hurt).
		Tiredness
	Psychological barriers	Lack of motivation
		Unwillingness, lack of determination, bad mood, laziness
	Time management barriers	Homework load
		Housework load
		Hobbies
		Smart phones, computers
	Interpersonal barriers	Family
		Friends
		Close friends
	Availability/accessibility barriers	Financial
		Infrastructure (dressing room cold in winter)
		Equipment
	Programme barriers	Lack of motivation in PE lessons (old methods).
		Strenuous activity in PE lessons.
		Boring PE lessons

**Time management barriers.** The majority of the respondents said that they used to spend much time in school, doing homework (“By the way, studies are difficult, when you have 9 lessons you don’t want anything, just get to bed and have a sleep,” M5; “Some time ago I didn’t have enough time for sports because I had much homework, just did and got to bed”, M8), doing housework (“<...> I think don’t do sports because I have to tidy the rooms, prepare food at home because my parents are divorced. I live with my father, usually I have a lot of hard work to do”, M3), being online, gaming, chatting, surfing the web. etc. (“And now, when we have smart phones and computers, we are lazy to do something or do sport”, M3), one student noted he had a hobby (“I like drawing more but I think it’s never late to start doing sport, regardless of your age”, M6). Various sports apps, e.g., “Push Ups”, “Sit Ups”, etc. are available

and demonstrate the benefit of physical activity and promote it.

**Interpersonal barriers.** They fall into 3 groups: friends, family and close friends. The respondents said that they were physically inactive because used to spend much time with friends (“<...> I like spending time with my friends rather than doing sport”, M3; “<...> all spend summer holidays with friends and have no time for sport. Of course, I would like do sport, but my friends are more important”, M5), were not supported by the family (“Another barrier, in my case, is my family. I’m not allowed to choose sport I want to do most”, M2). A close friend’s opinion was also very important (“My boyfriend does not want me to do sport”, M5).

**Availability / accessibility barriers** (the environment and equipment). The respondents named

a cold dressing room (“<...> I did not like sports in winter because we change clothes in a cold dressing room”, M5), outdated equipment (“I don’t want to go to PE lessons, I think the flooring and the old basketball hoops should be replaced in the sports hall”, M2). These barriers should be addressed.

**Programme barriers.** The respondents said that PE lessons used to be boring (“Maybe I’ll never do sport because I’m not interested in what we are told to do. That’s why I skip PE lessons, simply they are not interesting”, M2), the intensity and difficulty of exercise did not suit them (“I felt bad in PE lesson, the requirements were high and I didn’t like it”, M8). The conclusion is that the difficulty and intensity of exercise in PE lessons should meet individual needs and fitness level, a wide range of exercise should be offered, information about less popular sports provided.

## Discussion

**Variety of physical activity.** The research data confirmed the ideas put forward in scientific literature that female students in secondary schools choose traditional physical activities, basketball, athletics, dancing, jogging, workouts in the gym, etc. and want to individualize them. Only one respondent said that she used to exercise in PE lessons.

**Understanding the benefits of physical activity.** The respondents did not emphasize the physical health benefit: it is likely that they were satisfied with their physical health and were unaware of various disease risks in this age.

## Barriers to physical activity

**Physical barriers.** The survey proved that, as it is stated in literature (Telama et al., 2002), a person’s physical status depends on his physical activity therefore exercise that helps reduce tiredness and relax should be offered.

**Psychological barriers.** The survey proved that, as it is stated in literature, self-motivation, positive emotions, family and friends opinion are the most important factors motivate people engage in physical activity.

**Time management barriers.** Although the respondents stated that they used to spend much time doing homework and housework, it is likely that watching TV, gaming, chatting being online, surfing the web take more time.

**Interpersonal barriers.** The survey proved that the opinion of the family and friends was really very important but since the majority of the respondents live in dormitories the influence of their friends, peers and teachers is more important than of their family.

**Availability/accessibility barriers.** The survey proved that, as it is stated in literature, teaching /

learning environments, a comfortable changing room, modern equipment, etc. have a positive impact and are strong motivators therefore the issue should be seriously addressed.

**Programme barriers.** The survey proved that, as it is stated in scientific literature, a teacher’s role and competence are very important in PE lessons, lessons should be interesting, engaging, adapted to individual needs and fitness level.

## Conclusions

1. The survey showed that the respondents’ experience of physical activity in PE lessons and outside of school hours is bad.
2. The survey showed that the benefit of physical activity to physical health is not very important.
3. The survey showed that negative emotions are the most serious barrier to physical activity and attention should be paid to this factor.
4. The survey showed that another serious barrier is time management skills and attention should be paid to their development.

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### Summary

## RESEARCH INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OF FEMALE STUDENTS, ENROLLED IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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The benefit of regular physical activity to physical health has been proven. Regular physical activity guarantees better and longer life, physical and emotional wellbeing, reduces the risk of various diseases. If female students', enrolled in vocational education, experiences of physical activity in schools remain unknown, it will be difficult to promote physically active lifestyle. **The aim** of the paper is to analyse female students' experiences in PE lessons and outside of school hours. **Research methods:** scientific literature overview, qualitative research, analysis of open-ended survey data. **The research findings** show that female students' experiences in PE lessons and outside of school hours are bad. The respondents did not emphasise the benefit of physical health at all. Although scientific literature provides many types of barriers to physical activity; only some of them were identified and were mainly related to time management skills.

**Keywords:** benefit of physical activity, barriers to physical activity.

**Santrauka****PROFESINĖS MOKYKLOS MERGINŲ FIZINIO AKTYVUMO TYRIMAS PATIRTIES ASPEKTU*****T. Gulbinas***

Reguliarus fizinio aktyvumo nauda fizinei sveikatai neginčijamai įrodyta. Reguliarus dalyvavimas aktyvioje fizinėje veikloje asocijuojasi su geresnės kokybės ir ilgesniu gyvenimu, mažina įvairių ligų riziką ir teikia daugiau psichologinės ir emocinės naudos. Nežinant, kokia yra profesinių mokyklų merginų fizinio aktyvumo patirtis bendrojo lavinimo mokykloje, sudėtinga ieškoti efektyvių fizinio aktyvumo skatinimo būdų. Tyrimu siekiama išsiaiškinti, su kokia fizinio aktyvumo patirtimi (fizinio aktyvumo įgūdžiais, įpročiais) ateina mokinės į profesines mokyklas. Ar suvokia jos fizinio aktyvumo naudą? Kas merginoms trukdo būti fiziškai aktyvioms? ***Tyrimo tikslas*** – išanalizuoti profesinės mokyklos merginų fizinio aktyvumo patirtį, įgytą bendrojo lavinimo mokykloje ir neformaliojo ugdymo metu. ***Tyrimo metodai*** – mokslinės literatūros analizė ir kokybinis duomenų rinkimas (atviro tipo klausimai, raštu). ***Tyrimo rezultatai*** rodo, jog merginų teigiama kūno kultūros pamokų patirtis yra menka. Mokinės visiškai neakcentuoja fizinės sveikatos svarbos. Mokslinėje literatūroje apibrėžiama daug fizinio aktyvumo barjerų, tačiau skirtingos tiriamųjų grupės išsiskiria tik joms būdingais fizinio aktyvumo barjeriais. Tirtos merginos daugiausia barjerų nurodė laiko valdymo srityje – net keturis.

**Prasminiai žodžiai:** fizinio aktyvumo nauda, fizinio aktyvumo barjerai.

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