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Original research article

Watching television in free time by school-aged youth in Central Slovakia



Mária Kožuchová^{a,*}, Martina Bašková^b

^a Catholic University in Ružomberok, Faculty of Health Care, Department of Nursing, Slovak Republic

^b Comenius University in Bratislava, Jessenius Faculty of Medicine, Institute of Midwifery, Slovak Republic

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore the television watching habits on weekdays and on weekends of school-aged youth in Central Slovakia. The data were collected in 25 elementary schools and two eight-year high schools in the Žilina and Banská Bystrica regions from May to June 2010. The group of respondents consisted of 1187 pupils in three age categories: 11-year-olds (313 respondents), 13-year-olds (442 respondents) and 15-year-olds (432 respondents). The standardized questionnaire created for the requirements of the Health Behaviour in School Aged Children (HBSC) study was used for the collection of the data, which also contained demographic data such as gender, grade, and age. The significant interaction of two variables was evaluated using the chi-quadrat test. One-third or fewer respondents in the monitored group spent 2 h of their free time on weekdays and on weekends watching television. Most frequently, 11-year-old and 13-year-old boys (26%) spent their free time on weekdays viewing television for 2 h. The differences between the age groups were statistically significant ($p = 0.012$). On weekend days 25% of 13-year-old boys spent their leisure time viewing television for 3 h. The differences between the age groups were statistically significant ($p = 0.018$). An increased number of hours spent watching television has a negative impact on the health of children and young people, contributes to physical inactivity and decreased school performance, and leads to a sedentary lifestyle. An appropriate use of free time plays an important role in the daily regime of schoolchildren.

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Introduction

The meaningful use of free time is a powerful tool for the positive formation of the personality of children and young

people. It creates space for the creation of self-discipline and self-realization in accordance with the needs and interests of the individual, and therefore it is inseparably related to lifestyle and healthy living [1]. Today's lifestyle is characterized by a loss of physical activity and excessive idleness,

* Corresponding author at: Catholic University in Ružomberok, Faculty of Health Care, Department of Nursing, Námestie A. Hlinku 60, 034 01 Ružomberok, Slovak Republic.

E-mail address: majka.kozuchova@gmail.com (M. Kožuchová).

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particularly by the excessive watching of television. Daily TV viewing can become a routine for children and youth thus supports a habit of sedentary work, restricts an active attitude towards life, reduces the development of broader interests, and can have a negative impact on cognitive development and the creation of a child's social skills [2]. Paľa [3] stated that when the average time spent on weekdays by a child reading books and magazines is compared with the average time spent viewing TV, as reported by parents, the time watching television was three times higher. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the Canadian Paediatric Society recommend parents to restrict the daily TV viewing time to 1–2 h [4,5]. Viewing television excessively can have long-term unfavourable health effects [4]. Research studies have shown that longer television viewing is connected with a number of undesirable effects, such as obesity [6], and it has also a negative impact on learning and worsening of school achievements [5]. Mark et al. [7] observed that excessive television watching affects also social development, which can lead to aggressive behaviour, violence or substance abuse.

The habit of extensive television watching starts in preschool age and is closely related to lessening of physical activity [2]. Dobbins et al. [8], based on an analysis of 26 studies related to the efficiency of school interventions in the support of physical activities, came to the conclusion that physical activity had a positive effect on health and restricted the time of television viewing. Berou [9] observed that television viewing worsened poor posture, kyphosis and scoliosis due to physical inactivity and positions taken during long periods of watching TV.

The HBSC study is a wide, cross-national study that started as an initiative of three countries in 1983 (UK, Finland and Norway). The objective is to monitor health, and the health-related behaviour of schoolchildren in their social context. This study presents selected findings of the HBSC research carried out in the area of Central Slovakia in 2010 and focuses on leisure-time television viewing of school children on weekdays and on weekends.

Materials and methods

The research sample was composed in accordance with the criteria of the HBSC study and stratified by regions and school types (elementary school, and eight-year high school). The data were acquired on 11-, 13- and 15-year-old schoolchildren representative of the population of Central Slovakia (the Žilina and Banská Bystrica regions). The group consisted of 1187 pupils (620 girls and 567 boys), and the data were collected from May 2010 to June 2010. The characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. Respondents who met the following preset criteria were included in the research group:

Table 1 – Characteristic of sample.

Sex	11	13	15	Total
Boys	145	194	228	567
Girls	168	248	204	620
Total	313	442	432	1187

- age (11-, 13- and 15-year-olds);
- the respondent was a pupil of an elementary school (5th–9th grade) and/or equivalent in eight-year high school (prima-kvinta);
- informed parental consent was required for participation in the research;
- willingness to collaborate.

The HBSC study is one of the first cross-national studies to be adopted by the World Health Organization and now there are more than 40 collaborating countries including Slovakia. The HBSC study required an international questionnaire, and this was translated into Slovak to be used for the collection of the data. The questionnaire was distributed in school classes by a team of trained administrators. The individual schools were selected from the list of all elementary schools and eight-year high schools in Slovakia provided by the Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education by random sampling carried out in the HBSC Data Management Centre (Bergen, Norway). The schools were contacted by telephone and asked if they would participate in the international HBSC study, and during this phone call, we obtained the approval of the managers of the schools agreeing to participate to randomly select samples of the particular classes from which the data were to be collected. The legal guardians of the respondents were acquainted with the research so that they could express their agreement/disagreement with the participation, which was voluntary.

For the purposes of the study, demographic factors (gender, grade, age) were analysed and also leisure-time television viewing on weekdays and on weekends. The significant interaction of two qualitative variables was evaluated by chi-quadrat test. Hypotheses were tested on a significance level of $p = 0.05$. The statistical software STATISTICA was used for the statistical analysis.

Results

The results analyse the use of leisure time for viewing television on weekdays and on weekends by age and sex. The frequency data (in percentages) are presented in the form of tables and charts.

Watching television (including DVD and video) on weekdays for about 2 h per day in their free time was reported by approximately 24% of respondents. This most frequently selected alternative of viewing TV in free time on weekdays was analysed from the point of view of differences between sexes and age groups (Table 2 and Chart 1).

The incidence of watching television (including DVD and video) in free time on weekdays in boys and girls is decreasing. In the group of 15-year-old respondents it remains at the same level (22%). In girls it is slightly decreasing, from 23% in 11-year-olds to 22% in 15-year-olds. A more significant decrease was found in boys, from 26% in 11-year-olds and 13-year-olds to 22% in 15-year-olds.

Viewing television (including DVD and video) for about 3 h per day in their free time on weekends was reported by more than 20% of respondents. This most frequently selected alternative was analysed from the point of view of differences between sexes and age groups (Table 3 and Chart 2).

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