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Original research article

Risky behaviour in adolescents in the East Bohemian region



Stanislava Hoferková^{*}, Václav Bělík

University of Hradec Králové, Faculty of Education, Department of Social Pathology and Sociology, Hradec Králové, Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to examine selected factors of health-related behaviour in children and youth in the Pardubice and Hradec Králové regions (which constitute East Bohemia). The participants were 664 pupils and were students of selected elementary and secondary schools.

The research was carried out by means of quantitative data collection, using a questionnaire of our own design which included scale questions. The questionnaire of risk behaviour in adolescence investigates the risk factors of lifestyle in children and youth, i.e. specifically the category of truancy, neglecting school duties, addictive behaviour, aggressive behaviour including self-harm, reproductive health-related risk behaviour, and computer and internet use-related risk behaviour. The contribution presents results concerning the selected categories of risk behaviour, including their interrelations. The results demonstrate the significant relations among the individual examined phenomena in the research group. Low gender differences are also interesting. In terms of gender, there were differences only in aggressive behaviour and the time spent using a computer or the internet. Male pupils scored higher in both the mentioned variables. Respondents' age was only related to truancy, which decreased as their age increased.

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Introduction

Different fields of science have been interested in risk behaviour, e.g. medicine, sociology, psychology and education. Therefore, the phenomenon of risk behaviour can be consid-

ered multidisciplinary. Širůčková [1] defines it as diverse forms of behaviour, which negatively affect one's health, social and psychological functioning, and threaten one's social surroundings. The common denominator of all forms of risk behaviour is the criterion of the pre-pathological level of the monitored phenomenon, i.e. that the theoretical systems which are

^{*} Corresponding author at: University of Hradec Králové, Faculty of Education, Department of Social Pathology and Sociology, Rokitanského 62, 500 03 Hradec Králové, Czech Republic.

E-mail address: stanislava.hoferkova@uhk.cz (S. Hoferková).

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concerned with risk behaviour, do not go beyond into the description of the phenomenon's pathological aspect (e.g. addictive behaviour).

Measures of primary prevention are aimed at an individual who is in the so-called pre-pathological phase; when he/she is in danger – either real or expected, but not yet fully in an undesirable condition [2].

Experimenting with risks is typical of adolescence and usually temporary; however, potential health risks and consequences in adulthood must not be overlooked. Currently, the so-called new youth morbidity has been discussed, which is the main cause of mortality in this developmental period. In this context, the World Health Organization (WHO) identified adolescents as a separate at-risk population group; moreover, the health of adolescents is defined also as an absence of risk and/or problem behaviour. The Risk Behaviour Syndrome in Adolescence (RBS-A) comprises three main domains of risk behaviour [3]:

- (1) substance abuse – in our region, licit substance use and cannabis use is a serious problem; non-substance addictions related to information technologies are on the rise as well, the age of users is decreasing, and the number of female users increasing;
- (2) negative phenomena concerning psychosocial development – behavioural disorders and social maladaptation manifestations (cruelty to the weak, property damage, theft, lying, school failure, truancy, running away from home, auto-aggression and suicidal behaviour, delinquency and criminality) typical of which is a frequent psychiatric comorbidity;
- (3) and reproductive health-related risk behaviour – early sexual activity, promiscuity, frequent and unwanted pregnancies, venereal diseases.

Above all, risk behaviours are associated with children and youth and their primary environment – family relationships, school environment, peer communication etc. In their daily practice, teachers encounter various forms of risk behaviour. According to Hroncová et al. [4], the sharp increase in social pathological phenomena during the transformation era in the Slovak Republic triggered the social need for the increased efficiency of prevention and its professionalization. The increased prevalence of social pathological phenomena in society was reflected in the increase in the manifestations of risk behaviour in children and youth. According to the authors, the problems have persisted to the present day, and the global economic crisis has accentuated them even more.

International studies, which allow the comparison of data on European and global scales, are the main sources of research data related to risk behaviour of children and youth. For instance, the European School Study on Alcohol and Other Drugs [5], International research study on health and lifestyle of children and youth [6], the project named Risk Factors of School, Social and Health Development of Youth [7], and the International Self-Report Delinquency Study [8]. At the domestic level, the most important partial research studies are those of the Clinic of Addictology, the Institute of Criminology and Social Prevention [9], and the Masaryk Czech Sociological Association – specifically the section of social

pathology. The research carried out by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, thanks to its grant policy (specific studies and sectoral studies) also bring valuable information, as well as the studies of research centres (e.g. Czech Academy of Sciences) and universities – e.g. Department of Psychology at the Philosophical Faculty of the Palacky University in Olomouc, which has been examining for a long time the association between risk behaviour and selected social and personality variables in adolescents [10,11]; and the research of the Centre for Prevention of Risky Virtual Communication at the Faculty of Education of the Palacky University in Olomouc [12]. Finally, there are also partial studies carried out by non-profit organizations and schools.

Results of the above-mentioned research projects suggest a significant decrease in the prevalence of risk behaviour in children and youth. The decrease was predominantly in the regular substance abuse and other forms of risk behaviour including criminality and delinquency. Moreover, it is a general trend, which is specific not only for the Czech environment but similar changes have been registered in many other European countries. An alarming fact is that while there was a higher prevalence of substance abuse in boys at the end of the 20th century, lately such gender differences have been diminishing.

Materials and methods

Since 2015 the Department of Social Pathology and Sociology at the Faculty of Education of the University of Hradec Králové (PřF UHK) has been carrying out an extensive research on the health behaviour in adolescence (risk behaviour, psychological hardness, depressiveness etc.). For now, the research has been taking place in two regions of the Czech Republic: Pardubice and Hradec Králové. Due to the properties of the questionnaire, the data collection took place in secondary schools, high schools and vocational schools. The schools and individual classes were selected based on deliberate choice and availability, which depended on their willingness to participate in the study. We paid attention to an even representation of schools regarding their size and the size of the city.

The aim of the research was to assess the risk and protective factors of lifestyle in adolescent population. This target focused on the assessment of the below-mentioned phenomena, which characterize the problems of risk behaviour. Partial targets, which were not included in this contribution, concern the search for the correlations of risk behaviour, e.g. depressiveness, hardness, social support or physical exercise. Standardized questionnaires (e.g. the Children's Sense of Coherence Scale and the Czech version of the Children's Depression Inventory) and self-designed questionnaires were used to assess the selected personality variables.

No hypotheses were constructed for the purpose of this article. However, the research investigates *the prevalence and relations among the selected manifestations of risk behaviour in adolescents* using the risk behaviour questionnaire.

The experimental version of the Risk Behaviour in Adolescence Questionnaire was constructed with the use of selected

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