Do young people care about their health? The analysis of the Health Concern Scale among polish youths

(Czy młodzież martwi się o swoje zdrowie? Analiza Skali Troski o Zdrowie wśród młodych Polaków)

M Czerwińska-Rogowska 1,D, D Maciejewska1,E, K Ryterska1,B, P Serrano-Fernández 2C, F, K Jakubczyk 1,B, M Banaszczak 1E, A Wolska 1,B, E Chrabąszcz 1,B, M Kisielowska 1,B, Z Stachowska 1,B, A Stachowski 1,B, D Paszkiewicz 1,B, D Chróścielski 1,A, J Świącka1,B, E Chrabąszcz 1,B, M Kisielowska 1,B, Z Stachowska 1,E, F

Abstract – Introduction. In order to diminish the prevalence of civilization diseases, educational activities should be carried out among the youths to discuss the prevention strategies. However, before such educational attempts are made, one has to consider young people devotion to their health and main factors that influence such attitude.

The aim of the study. The aim of the study was to evaluate the concern for health among participants of the Woodstock Festival regarding their level of education, body mass, place of residence and age.

Material and methods. We enrolled 2015 Woodstock Festival (Kostrzyn, Poland) attendants (n=1316). The Health Concern Scale by Kähkönėn and Tuoril was used.

Results. After the analysis of the association between health concern and gender, we observed that women paid more attention to health than men (p=0,00596). Similarly, residents of bigger cities (p=0,06519) and highly educated participants (p=0,0601) presented more health care-related attitudes. The results of present study proved that there is a strong positive correlation between care for health and age, however only in men (p=0,03177). We proved that the higher the body mass index of a person was, the more care the person devoted to health (p<0,001).

Conclusion. The care of health increases with age and body mass, so basically at time when people begin to notice health-related problems. When organizing social campaigns to make people aware of how important it is to prevent obesity and its consequences particular attention should be paid to young men.

Key words - health, health concern, young people.

Słowa kluczowe - zdrowie, troska o zdrowie, młodzi ludzie.
I. INTRODUCTION

According to the report released in 2015 by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECE) health is the most important exponent of human well-being. Life satisfaction, education and a sense of security were latter ones [1]. It has long been known that lifestyle - thus physical activity level, diet, coping strategies and no stimulant addiction - has the greatest impact on human health [2-6]. However, healthy lifestyle should be lead form the earliest period of life. Late adolescence is a kind of challenge for a young person. Youths start their first job and begin to live on their own account. All of these events may predispose to the development of unhealthy habits such as eating junk food (usually containing a large amount of simple carbohydrates and poor quality fats), sedentary lifestyle and consequently overweight, obesity and other nutrition-related diseases [7]. Scientific research has shown that obese young people compared to their normal body mass peers live in average 8 years shorter and are twice more exposed to death at the age of 55 years [8]. As effective and especially long-term reduction of body weight in people with obesity is difficult to achieve and the consequences of excessive body weight directly affect health state, it is of highest priority to prevent the progression of overweight, obesity and their consequences via various ways promoting healthy lifestyle [9].

Inadequate diet and high alcohol consumption are prevalent among young adults. Also, a tendency to eat more spicy snacks and fast food by young people compared to the elderly eating more vegetables, fruit and whole grains was found [10]. Worse eating habits with small fruit and vegetable ingestion - have been confirmed in other studies [11, 12].

Although a relatively small percentage of young Europeans (aged 15-35 years) suffer from any diseases, this number is gradually increasing with age. At the age of 55-64 years, the percentage of people with evident disease phenotype was found to be around 40% [13]. Young people most often die because of the so-called external causes, e.g. in traffic accidents. At later age deaths secondary to cardiovascular diseases or cancer predominate [14]. However, it was estimated, that the number of people suffering from civilization diseases will increase [15].

Such increasing tendency, made the World Health Organization WHO to set the two pivotal goals of their activity, namely to prevent the progression of diabetes and obesity and to reduce mortality due to cardiovascular and cancer diseases [16]. To achieve all of these, educational activities should be undertaken to make young people aware how to prevent themselves from civilization diseases and – more precisely - how important well-balanced diet and physical activity are.

The results of current research confirmed that health education contribute to improving the state of knowledge, awareness and eating behavior of educated people [17-21]. However, such educational plan should be properly designed and addressed to a particular group of recipients [7]. Consequently, before we start educational campaigns, one should consider if young people are concerned about their health and what are the main factors affecting this phenomenon. This knowledge will allow to better design of educational strategies and to precisely choose priorities and motivational factors favoured by young people.

The aim of the study was to evaluate the concern for health among participants of the Woodstock Festival 2015 regarding their level of education, body mass, place of residence, and age.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study group consisted of participants of the Woodstock festival which took place between 30.07-1.08 2016 in Kostrzyn, Poland. During the three days of the festival reviewers surveyed 1316 persons. We collected data using
electronic tablets and telephones. For this purpose the electronic version (application) of a questionnaire was created.

**Health Concern Scale**

To assess the concern of health, a questionnaire by Kähkönen and Tuorila was used [22]. The survey consists of 10 statements related to patients’ concerns about their health, weight gain and incidence of nutrition-related disorders like. The evaluation was performed in 1-item scale, ranging from 1 (“definitely not”) to 7 (“definitely yes”). Following authors we assumed that the higher number of points, the bigger concern of one’s health.

**III. RESULTS**

The study group consisted of 1316 persons (566 women and 750 men) aged 18 to 35 years (mean age for women 23.8 ± 6.6 years, for men 24.3 ± 6.5 years).

The analysis of the anthropometric parameters proved that the average BMI value in both women and men was within the normal range. However, it should be noted that in males, BMI value was on the borderline of the upper limit of the normality. Waist circumference in both groups was found to be within a normal range.

While analyzing the relationship between the care of health and gender it was observed that women are significantly more concerned about their health compared to men (p = 0.00596).

We found that that the place of residence as well as the level of education were significantly associated with the care of health. People living in smaller towns manifested less intense care of their health. In case of women, the opposite statistical trend was observed (p = 0.06519). As far as the level of education is concerned, we found a statistical tendency that the people with higher level of education tended to manifest more intense care of their health (p = 0.0601).
The results showed a strong positive correlation between the care of health and age, however such association was significant only in males (p = 0.03177). In females, the care of health was correlated to their age.

IV. DISCUSSION

An Eurstat (European Statistical Office) study held in 2008 has shown that only about 15% of people aged 25-34 years suffer from a chronic disease or have any health-related problem. This percentage increases successively with age and within the group of 55-64 years amounts to approximately 45%. A similar trend has been seen in the self-assessment of health made by Europeans. Only about 2% of men and women aged 25-34 years described their health as bad or very bad, whereas the percentage in people aged 55-64 years was found to be around 12%. This indicates that the self-esteem of one's health largely depends on the incidence of chronic diseases and insufficient physical activity [13, 23]. The self-assessment of health was described as quite important indicator as it directly translates into the actual health of the assessor [24].

The results of our research proved that there is a strong trend to increase care of health with age. This is not surprisingly as the incidence of chronic diseases increases with age which further worsen the state of health thus cause greater concern for it. Young people who generally are less likely to suffer from chronic diseases can determine their health as good and consequently do not care about their well-being until they begin to feel the effects of its deterioration.

Concern of one’s health may be expressed as, for example, the use of a rational and well-balanced diet. The relationship between age and nutrition was confirmed by Bezerra et al. The authors have shown that older people eat better foods than younger ones. While young people were demonstrated to eat more high-calorie and low-nutritional foods (higher consumption of non-alcoholic beverages, pizza and pasta), older people were shown to ingest more fruit and vegetables and cereal products [25]. In a study by Teleman et al., such differences in eating behaviors regarding age were also observed. The study showed that the number of students who was eating a minimum of 2 servings of vegetables per day increased with their age [11]. Age-related eating habits may be - as described above – due to the deterioration of health and worse self-esteem of health. Finally greater care of health may translate into better health behaviors, including greater care of one’s diet.

In our study we found that women cared for their health more intensively in comparison to men. In general, most studies have shown that women lead a healthier lifestyle, e.g. they often use diet with reduced fat or carbohydrate content. Despite that, women still manifest objections to
their diet and believe that they ingest too much simple sugars or that they should lose weight [26, 27]. Men, on the other hand, eat more red processed meat (predominantly ham and sausages) or fried foods [28]. Perhaps the reason for worse eating habits in males is less knowledge about the principles of proper nutrition [29-31].

The studies confirmed that people with a lower level of education lead a less healthy lifestyle (e.g., they use drugs more often, eat poorly) than people with higher education [32, 33]. This is related to the lack of knowledge on health and its determinants in persons with not enough educational background. The results of our study have shown that people with higher education expressed greater concern of their health. Educated people who realize how important a healthy lifestyle is, even though they might not apply its determinants themselves, can express a greater concern of their health.

In present study, we found a significant positive correlation between body mass index and health care. People with higher BMI values presented more intense concern of their health. Similarly persons with larger waist circumference expressed greater concern of their health. In fact, people with a higher BMI (i.e. overweight or obese) and higher waist circumference may begin to worry about their health for two main reasons. First of all, they might be aware that overweight and obesity elevate the risk toward serious health problems thus are more concerned about themselves. On the other hand they might have experienced the consequences of overweight and obesity which prompted them to be more worried about their health.

In summary, our study proved that care of one’s health intensifies with age and body weight, thus in periods associated with the origin of health-related problems. Healthy activities should be implemented much earlier, at young age and/or when the body weight is within a normal range as only a healthy lifestyle may guarantee effective prevention against civilization diseases. By organizing social campaigns to make people aware of how important it is to prevent obesity and its consequences, it is worth to pay attention to young men. This is of high importance as WHO and other authorities demonstrated that men live shorter compared to women and lead a less healthy lifestyle [34, 35].

V. REFERENCES


