



The shift in students' perspectives on physical activity: the contrasting nature of individual preferences

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Abstract

Objective of the study was to identifying individual and collective preferences for physical activity among students.

Methods and structure of the study. Based on the findings of the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics, a study was conducted among students ($n=1272$) to explore their physical activity patterns during the academic day. The results were compared with the findings of previous research conducted in 2020-2022.

Results and conclusions. The students are divided into two categories: those who do not engage in physical activity and those who express a desire to lead a healthy lifestyle and participate in physical activity two to three times a week. The use of exercises for general physical development has decreased, with a shift in focus towards preventing posture disorders, developing strength, and improving coordination. Among the students in the second group, we observed a shift in priorities towards a healthy lifestyle, with a strong emphasis on family, school, and university values. The cohort prioritizes physical activity in the comfortable environment of «digital self-isolation». The academic discipline «Physical Culture» is essential for all students, serving as a foundation for the development of a secondary need for physical activity for the first group and a competent approach to exercise selection for the second group.

Keywords: students, physical activity, installations, personal priorities, university teachers, wellness systems.

Introduction. The student community, as a socio-demographic group, has distinctive features (culture, values, interests). The influence of constant stressors (intensification of education; technologization and digitalization of society; instability of the geopolitical situation) leads, on the one hand, to a deterioration in students' health, and on the other hand, to the search for new strategies to improve health [1]. In order to modernize physical education taking into account the interests of students, it is necessary to conduct a cohort study of their value-need attitudes and priorities in physical activity.

Objective of the study was to identifying individual and collective preferences for physical activity among students.

Methods and structure of the study. The study was conducted at the Plekhanov Russian University of Economics: literature analysis; empirical research

($n=1272$) in 2024 (online survey «Physical activity in the daily routine of a modern student»); comparative analysis of students' attitudes towards physical activity (based on the results of research in 2020-2022) [2] and the study conducted; formulation of conclusions.

Results of the study and discussion. A cohort study, as a type of longitudinal research, is used to study a group of people united by a common characteristic (experience) through repeated observations [5]. Student youth are a cohort by age, status (studying at a university), and jointly experienced (COVID-19) and experiencing life events (geopolitical situation).

The concept of «attitude» is interpreted as an individual's readiness to implement a current need, expressed in a person's internal position (value orientations) in relation to events and facts [4].

Based on the concept of «priorities», showing the importance, primacy of something; personal priorities



are guidelines that help an individual make decisions to achieve a certain goal [3].

According to the results of previous studies (during the period of measures (COVID-19), the transition from distance to blended learning), students, under the influence of stressors, experienced a change in life priorities (in communication, physical activity, use of gadgets) [3].

The next repeated online survey (n = 1272) in the 2024-2025 academic year made it possible to obtain new data on the priorities and readiness of young people for various types of activities in the daily routine. A comparative analysis of sociological studies made it possible to consider changes in the physical activity of students in the school day and week. There have been changes in the physical activity of students (Figure 1): a decrease in daily physical activity due to students switching to full-time education (travel time), choosing life priorities (study, rest); an increase in physical activity two to three times a week, which indicates a desire to lead a healthy lifestyle.

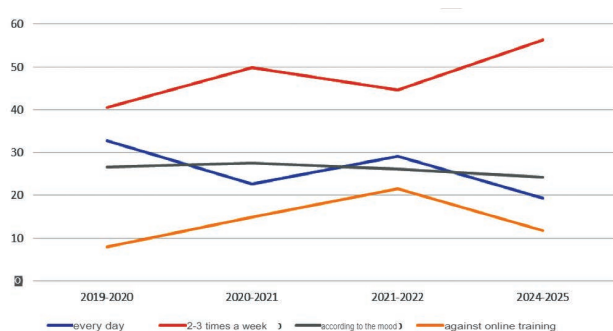


Figure 1. «How often do you engage in physical activity?»

The adaptation of students to life in a situation of uncertainty (instability of the geopolitical situation) and the importance of strengthening psychophysical health for self-realization in modern society can act as a factor in increasing physical activity.

The wave-like trend of increasing and decreasing negative attitudes of students towards online training

is due to their adaptation to the conditions of social distancing, adaptation to life in conditions of offline isolation and online communication.

There is a constant increase in the number of students who do not engage in physical activity, a decrease in daily morning exercises and physical exercise complexes (PE), which leads to a decrease in the level of health (Figure 2).

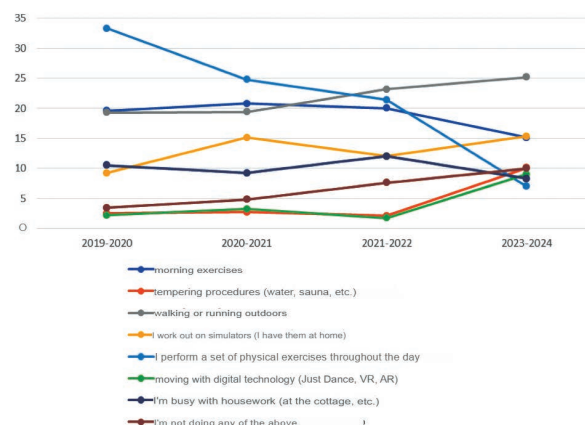


Figure 2. «Your preferences in types of physical activity»

The priority indicators for home exercise equipment training indicate changes in attitudes towards physical activity:

- an increase (2020-2021) in the number of training sessions compared to 2020 is due to the desire to engage in physical education in any life circumstances;
- a decrease (2021-2022) is due to the desire for offline communication;
- an increase in the indicator (2023-2024) and a return to the results of 2021-2022 is explained by the desire to exercise in social isolation.

It is worth paying attention to the indicators: «physical activity using digital technologies» and «hardening procedures»:

- a decrease in the priority of these areas in 2021-2022 is due to the desire to exercise offline (teachers and fellow students);

The students' choice of physical exercises is presented in the table.

Priority areas for the use of physical exercises	2019-2020, %	2020-2021, %	2021-2022, %	2023-2024, %
Development of strength abilities	16,7	14,5	18,6	20,6
Prevention of posture disorders	8,1	11,2	13,6	21,9
Development of coordination	3,1	2,7	3,6	15,7
Development of flexibility	11,1	9,9	9,0	14,8
General physical development	61,0	61,7	55,2	27,0



- an increase in indicators in 2023-2024. indicates the desire of students to lead a healthy lifestyle in comfortable self-isolation (hardening, sauna, «digital» physical activity on exercise machines and in the fresh air).

The following health systems were identified as priorities for students: «stretching» (21,5%) and «healthy back» (20,2%) (Figure 3).

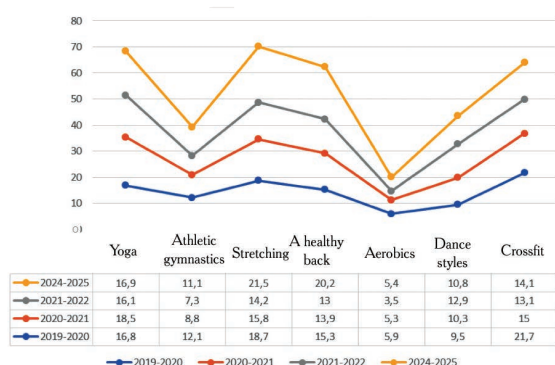


Figure 3. Priority health systems of physical exercises

There is a decrease in the use of physical exercises aimed at general physical development, priorities are shifting to:

- posture prevention (21,9%) due to a sedentary lifestyle;
- strength development (20,6%) due to the fashion for a beautiful physique;
- coordination development (15,7%), which indicates both a conscious understanding of the decrease in coordination abilities and the choice of exercises based on interest, and not the rational use of all physical exercises that teachers can recommend, but not online sources.

Thus, students are divided into groups: the first group does not engage in physical activity; the other shows a desire to lead a healthy lifestyle and physical activity in self-isolation (walking and running in the fresh air, hardening, stretching and healthy back exercises). The second group of students was found to have a healthy lifestyle based on value orientations (family, school, university) and a cohort priority in the implementation of physical activity (two or three

times). Personal priorities (in conditions of comfortable «digital» self-isolation) are divided into the following areas: exercise machines; walking and running in the fresh air; hardening procedures; performing exercises to form posture, develop strength and coordination.

Conclusions. It is necessary to indicate the importance of compulsory classes within the framework of academic disciplines (modules) in physical education for all students:

- for students of the first group (loss of primary need) in order to form a secondary need for motor activity;
- for students of the second group in order to take a competent approach to the choice of physical exercises and consulting assistance from university teachers.

Priorities in physical activity show the students' focus on improving their health, but there is a lack of knowledge in the field of physical education for independent preparation for successful professional self-realization and protection of the country's interests.

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