# Factors contributing to increased physical activity among young people of working age

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**Abstract**

**Objective of the study** is to identify motivational factors for involving able-bodied young people in physical education.

**Methods and structure of the study.** Based on a survey of 920 students, three key motivational blocks were identified: self-affirmation (especially significant for physically active young men), health (a universal priority) and self-improvement (important for young women).

**Results and conclusions.** It has been established that 61.2 % of physically active young men and 60.2 % of young women consider health improvement to be their main motivation, while competitive motives are significant for 52.3 % of active young men compared to 26.3 % of physically inactive young men. The authors propose a differentiated approach to motivating able-bodied young people, taking into account gender characteristics and levels of physical activity, with an emphasis on competitive programs for boys and fitness activities for young women.

***Keywords:*** *physical activity, able-bodied youth, healthy lifestyle, physical culture, health development.*

**Introduction.** Physical education specialists note that students' lack of involvement in physical education and sports activities is largely due to young people's weak orientation towards the values of health and a healthy lifestyle. This problem is linked both to the absence of strong cultural and historical traditions promoting physical perfection and to a lack of internal motivation to participate in sports. Meanwhile, it is motivation, understood as a conscious desire to achieve set goals, that plays a decisive role in forming a lasting interest in physical activity and is a key factor in the successful organization of physical education and health-improving activities among young students.

**Objective of the study** is to identify motivational factors for involving able-bodied young people in physical education.

**Methods and structure of the study.** The methodological basis of the study was based on the use of a questionnaire survey, which allowed us to obtain representative data on the self-assessment of the motivational attitudes of employable young people. An adapted version of a standardized questionnaire developed by specialists from the Saint-Petersburg Scientific-Research Institute for Physical Culture. This methodology was modified to take into account current trends in the field of physical education for young people. The study involved 920 respondents (501 girls and 419 boys) aged 16 to 24, who are citizens of the Russian Federation and represent various regions of the country.

To ensure the validity of the results and identify significant differences in motivational profiles, all participants were divided into two contrasting groups based on their level of physical activity: low physical activity group (n = 578): able-bodied young people who devote 60 minutes or less to physical exercise 2 or fewer days a week (350 young women and 228 young men) and a group with high physical activity (n = 342): able-bodied young people who engage in physical activity for at least 60 minutes a day 5 or more times a week (151 young women and 191 young men).

The study included an assessment of the importance of various motivational factors using a three-point Likert scale (‘very important,’ ‘quite important,’

'not important'). Participants were asked to assess the importance of three main categories of motivation: competitive motivation ('to win'); health motivation ('to improve my health'); aesthetic motivation ('to look good').

To ensure the methodological rigor of the study, modern methods of statistical analysis were used. Responses between groups were compared using the $\chi^2$ (Pearson's chi-square) criterion with statistical significance levels set at $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$. This approach made it possible not only to identify differences in motivational profiles, but also to determine the degree of their statistical reliability.

The study paid particular attention to analyzing gender differences in motivational preferences, as well as identifying potential correlations between the level of physical activity and the dominant types of motivation

**Results of the study and discussion.** Data analysis showed a clear correlation between the frequency of physical activity and the significance of various motivational factors, revealing both general trends and gender-specific characteristics.

Health motivation ('to improve health') was the leading factor for all categories of respondents. However, interesting patterns were observed here: among physically active young men, the significance of this motive was significantly higher (61.2 % versus 47.8 %), with a difference of 13.4 percentage points that was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 10.352$ at $p < 0.01$). Among young women, the health motive dominated in both groups (56.2 % and 60.2 %), but the differences were not statistically significant.

Competitive motivation ('to win') showed the most pronounced differences between the groups. Among young men with low physical activity, about a quarter of respondents (26.3%) considered this factor to be extremely important, while in the group with high activity, the absolute majority of respondents (52.3 %) gave this answer. At the same time, about 37 % of inactive young men did not attach any importance to the competitive aspect, while among physically active young men, only 19.8 % felt this way. The statistical significance of these differences is confirmed by high $\chi^2$ values (31.644 at $p < 0.01$). A similar trend was observed among young women: 49.0 % of physically active participants versus 17.1 % of physically inactive young women rated competitive motivation as the most important. The largest gap between the groups (22.9 percentage points) was recorded for the answer 'not important', which was also statistically confirmed ($\chi^2 = 32.491$ at $p < 0.01$).

Aesthetic motivation ('to look good') showed the following results: among young men, the difference between the groups was 16.1 percentage points for the answer 'very important' (49.7 % of physically active men versus 33.6 % of inactive men, $\chi^2 = 12.584$ at $p < 0.01$). Among young women, this motive was important for the majority in both groups (50.9 % and 54.2 %), but the differences were not statistically significant.

Based on the data obtained, three motivational blocks can be identified. The self-affirmation block (competitive motivation) is characteristic of active students, especially young men. The health block is a universal factor that is significant for all categories of working-age youth. The self-improvement block (aesthetic motivation) is especially important for girls, regardless of their level of physical activity.

Thus, the priority motive for the absolute majority of working-age youth, regardless of their current level of physical activity, is to improve their health. This basic factor occupies a leading position in the hierarchy of motivational preferences among both young men and young women, confirming the universal value of the health aspect of physical culture.

However, the analysis revealed significant gender differences in additional motivational factors. A significant proportion of young men, especially those who are actively involved in sports, demonstrate a pronounced orientation towards competitive motives and self-affirmation through sporting achievements. This is manifested in the high importance of aspects such as 'the desire to win' and 'demonstrating physical superiority'. At the same time, young women are more oriented towards self-improvement and the aesthetic aspects of physical activity, which is reflected in their particular attention to criteria such as 'good physical shape' and 'attractive appearance.'

**Conclusions.** The results obtained are of great practical importance for the development of an effective system to motivate students to engage in regular physical education activities. The key focus of such work should be the formation of a sustainable motivational and value-based attitude towards physical education and sports activities. This process requires a comprehensive approach and includes several interrelated components: the cognitive component – forming a holistic understanding among students of the value of physical education, its role in maintain-

ing health and improving quality of life; emotional and evaluative component – developing a positive emotional attitude towards classes, creating conditions for enjoying physical activity; and behavioral component – encouraging regular physical education and sports activities both as part of the compulsory program and outside school hours.

To achieve maximum effect, it is necessary to take into account the individual characteristics of the motivational sphere of different groups of students. For young men, it is particularly important to create conditions for the realization of competitive ambitions through a system of sporting events and competitions at various levels. For young women, programs focused on the aesthetic aspects of physical activity (fitness programs, dancing, gymnastics) with an emphasis on body shaping and improving appearance may be more effective. Male and female students with low levels of physical activity require a special approach aimed at overcoming barriers and creating a positive experience of exercise.

The most important condition for successful motivational work is a differentiated approach that takes into account gender-specific characteristics of motivation, current level of physical activity, personal preferences and interests, and individual physical abilities. Implementing such an approach requires the development of various forms of physical education and sports activities, the creation of a flexible system of sectional classes, and the introduction of modern methods of motivational support. Particular attention should be paid to creating a positive social climate around physical education, promoting a healthy lifestyle, and developing infrastructure for sports and health activities. Only by taking all these factors into account can we foster a lasting internal motivation among students to engage in regular physical activity, which will ultimately contribute to improving their health, quality of life, and success in their studies and future professional activities.

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