

**Research article**

**THE COMMUNICATION APPROACH AND ATTITUDES OF  
STUDENTS REGARDING THE EFFECTS OF  
SPORTS ACTIVITIES ON HEALTH**

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**Abstract.** *The student population is one of the most sensitive populations today, whereby it is necessary to consider the relationship between health and physical activity in order to improve students' quality of life. In addition to physical inactivity, health status is adversely affected by constant technological innovations and excessive socializing, consumption of alcohol, tobacco and narcotics. The aim of this study was to determine the differences between the communication approach and attitudes of first- and fourth-year students of the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education on the impact of sports on health and improvement of mental hygiene. Using a 60-item questionnaire, the study included 70 healthy respondents of both genders (Mean  $\pm$  SD: 20.86 $\pm$ 1.76 years). The respondents were divided into two subsamples, i.e. a group of first-year students (IG; n=34; F=15, M=19) and a group of fourth-year students (IVG; n=36; F=18, M=18). All obtained data are presented by descriptive parameters. The reliability of the survey in terms of internal compliance was tested by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The manifest space of attitudes was processed by the scaling technique. The Mann-Whitney U Test was used to determine differences in attitudes between first- and fourth-year students. For statistical significance of the differences in results between groups, the  $p < 0.05$  level of significance was used. The data were processed in the SPSS statistical package. The results of the study unequivocally confirmed the existence of a positive attitude among the student population about the impact of sports on health and improvement of mental hygiene, as well as that there are no statistically significant differences in most of the variables included in the testing (eight out of ten domains), i.e. that there is no great difference in the attitudes of first- and fourth-year students on the importance of sports for their psychophysical health.*

**Key words:** *physical activities, recreation, healthy lifestyle, exercise*

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## INTRODUCTION

Communication is a basic human need and activity, continuous throughout space and permanent in time, directed towards the outside world and towards the inner being. In order to understand other people and for them to understand us, it is necessary to establish an appropriate communication system, to start an intellectual process in which one mind influences another (Banjanin, 2003). Each communication model implies and emphasizes the importance of feedback as an integral component of this process. Equally distributed communication between sender and receiver is an ideal model of two-way symmetric communication (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, & Agee, 2006).

Apart from the basic existential needs, which stimulate instinctive behaviors in humans, most other stimuli come from the world of information, as the initiator of action, which gives action meaning and purpose. Information is a complex concept that implies at least three dimensions: new knowledge, the form by which this new knowledge is shaped to be transferred to other subjects of the communication process and purposefulness, that is, the activity dimension of the message (Tomić, 2003). The choice thus begins to depend on perceptions, previous experiences and attitudes, with which the motives for action are projected and implemented through consciousness. Another mediator of the information function is attitude. It represents a relatively stable mental organization of perceptions, knowledge, emotions and will. In other words, attitudes are considered to be a solid basis for human behavior. They act as a psycho-motor force on the human being to do something physically, or spiritually, or not. When the message reaches the existing attitude, it simultaneously introduces the reason for the future reaction (Jelenković & Jelenković, 2016). Attitude formation is a progressive process that sublimates thinking and feeling and completes it with intention and behavior (Banjanin, 2003). Attitude is formed in interpersonal communication and "develops either through direct experience or learning from others through socialization, and manifests through verbal expressions, emotions, visible actions, posture or behavior." (Banjanin, 2003, 118).

Drastic reduction of movement and a deficit of physical activities, as characteristics of all social groups, are the main features of the modern way of life, which results in impaired general health, even among the younger population (Nešić, Lolić, Srdić, & Meholfjić-Fetahović, 2011). The increase in the number of people with certain health problems in adulthood is often attributed to poor life habits and lifestyle in youth (Chan & Woo, 2010). Consequently, much attention has recently been paid to proper diet and physical activity as important factors in prevention and maintaining health at all ages (Macanović et al., 2013). One of the most sensitive populations today, where it is necessary to consider the relationship between health and physical activity in order to improve the quality of life, is the student population (Čokorilo & Mikalački, 2014), whose health is vital to the wider community (Guthrie et al., 1998; Holt & Powell, 2017) and which represents the largest capital and investment for the future of a society (Ilić Živojinović, 2014). Frequent disorders of psycho-physical health of the student population caused by numerous negative environmental factors and psycho-social stressors (Chew-Graham, Rogers & Yassin, 2003), as well as the complexity of the transition period from high school to more intensive university obligations, lead to a sedentary lifestyle (Nešić, Srdić & Fratić, 2013). Sedentary lifestyle is present in a large number of students, and obesity occurs (Budakov, et al., 2012), poor eating habits (Singh, Siahpush, Hiatt, & Timsina, 2011) and the occurrence of stress (Nešić, Perić, Srdić & Muhi, 2019). In addition

to physical inactivity, health status is adversely affected by constant technological innovations and excessive time spent on social networks (Krivokapić & Popović, 2011), alcohol consumption (Matović & Pavlović, 2019), tobacco (Cvetković, Nenadović, Stojanović-Tasić, & Milošević, 2015), and narcotics (Jugović, 2004). Due to the reduction in the number of hours of practical classes, as well as the reduction of students' interest in extracurricular or recreational activities in general, a trend of reduction in aerobic fitness was observed even among students of the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education, for whom exercise should be the essence of interest (Prebeg, Mihajlović & Mitić, 2012). Although students show a great tendency towards bad life habits, they recognize the importance and need for regular physical exercise, but also expect external support from the university to do so (Nešić & Kovačević, 2011). In support of a positive attitude and awareness of the impact of physical activity and sports on their lives, mental health and study outcomes (Kordić & Babić, 2011), there is a claim that students who engage in physical activity more often rate their health excellent or very good, compared to students who do not engage in physical activity (Čokorilo & Mikalački, 2014).

The aim of this study was to determine the differences in the communication approach and attitudes of first- and fourth-year students of the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education, on the impact of sports on health and improvement of mental hygiene.

## METHODS

### Sample of participants

In this cross-sectional study, the sample of respondents consisted of first- and fourth-year students of the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education, University of Niš. The sample included 70 healthy respondents of both genders, i.e. 37 male and 33 female respondents, chronological age ranging from 19 to 25 years (Mean  $\pm$  SD: 20.86  $\pm$  1.76 years). The inclusion criteria for the respondents were: that they are students of the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education of the University of Niš; that they do not participate in organized sports activities outside the faculty and are not professional athletes. The exclusion criteria for the respondents were: students who had not passed their Sociology and Psychology of sports courses, and students who participated in previous psychosociological research at the faculty. Respondents who satisfied the criteria for participation in the study were divided into two sub-samples, i.e. the group of first-year students (IG; n = 34; F = 15, M = 19), the age range 19 to 22 years (Mean  $\pm$  SD: 19.21  $\pm$  0.64 years) and the group of fourth-year students (IVG; n = 36; F = 18, M = 18), ages ranging from 22 to 25 years (Mean  $\pm$  SD: 22.42  $\pm$  0.73 years). All of the respondents voluntarily agreed to participate in the study/survey.

### Measures

To collect data on the attitudes of first- and fourth-year students of the Faculty of Sport and Physical Education in Niš on the impact of sports on health and improvement of mental hygiene, the survey method was used, and a specially designed closed-type questionnaire was used as the basic measuring instrument. The 60-item questionnaire collected information on: gender, age and year of the study, variables for examining the students' subjective attitudes about the importance of sports for health and improving

mental hygiene of the student population, and variables related to student involvement in sports activities. A five-point Likert-type scale was used in the questionnaire to collect data, with answers from completely negative to completely positive attitudes (1 = completely incorrect; 2 = mostly incorrect; 3 = not sure; 4 = mostly correct; 5 = completely correct). To examine students' involvement in sports, a five-point scale was used, consisting of the following statements: 1 = never; 2 = very rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = most frequently; 5 = regularly. All questions were classified into ten different domains depending on their specific area: 1) sport and health (D1); 2) sport as socializing and entertainment (D2); 3) sport and behavioral learning (D3); 4) manipulation of sports (D4); 5) sport and attitude towards other people (D5); 6) sport and violence (D6); 7) sports and money (D7); 8) sport and work activity (D8); 9) sport and education (D9); 10) sport and mental hygiene (D10). In order for the respondents not to cognitively assume the domains being researched, the order of the indicators was mixed.

The results obtained were analyzed, presented in tabular form and a discussion was conducted based on the determined attitudes of the respondents.

A cross-sectional model was applied in this study. Before the beginning of the survey, the respondents were verbally given information about the procedure of filling out the questionnaire and were acquainted with the purpose of conducting the research. The respondents were given the questionnaire which they filled out on the spot by an anonymous procedure.

### Statistical data analysis

All data are presented using parameters of descriptive statistics (medium value - mean, standard deviation - SD, minimum score - min and maximum score - max). The reliability of the survey in terms of internal compliance was tested by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (La Cruz, Gutiérrez, Gómez, & Torres, 2017). The manifest space of attitudes is processed by the scaling technique. The Mann-Whitney U Test was used to determine differences in attitudes between first- and fourth-year students. To determine any statistical significance of the differences between groups, a significance level of  $p < 0.05$  was used. The data were processed in the SPSS statistical package (IBM Corp. Released 2010. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 19.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.).

## RESULTS

The reliability of the measurement scale of the applied survey in this study was verified by Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Table 1). The value of Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.812) indicates that the survey used in this study has good reliability and an internal consistency of the whole scale.

**Table 1** Verification of the measurement scale - Cronbach's alpha coefficient

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.812	0.827	60

Legend: Cronbach's Alpha - Cronbach's alpha coefficient; N of Items - number of indicators.

Numerical and percentage values of the size of the total sample, as well as individually for each year of study in relation to the gender of the respondents, are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2** Number and percentage of the total sample of respondents by gender

Year of study of the respondents	Total number of respondents	Number and percentage (%) of female respondents	Number and percentage (%) of male respondents
I year	34	15 (44.12%)	19 (55.88%)
IV year	36	18 (50.00%)	18 (50.00%)
Total	70	33 (47.14%)	37 (52.86%)

Observing the tabulated numerical values of the arithmetic means of expressed attitudes for both groups (Table 3), fourth-year students have more pronounced positive attitudes compared to first-year students in most of the surveyed domains, such as "sport and health" (IVGD1 = 4.44 > IGD1 = 4.28), "sport as socializing and entertainment" (IVGD2 = 4.34 > IGD2 = 4.18), "sport and behavioral learning" (IVGD3 = 4.54 > IGD3 = 4.38), "sport manipulation" (IVGD4 = 3.93 > IGD4 = 3.88), "sport and attitudes towards other people" (IVGD5 = 4.43 > IGD5 = 4.25), "sport and work activity" (IVGD8 = 3.99 > IGD8 = 3.83), "sport and education" (IVGD9 = 4.44 > IGD9 = 4.14), and "sport and mental hygiene" (IVGD10 = 4.44 > IGD10 = 4.26).

**Table 3** Values of arithmetic means of the examined domains for both groups of students

Domain	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Sum
Mean (I year)	4.28	4.18	4.38	3.88	4.25	2.94	4.06	3.83	4.14	4.26	4.02
Mean (IV year)	4.44	4.34	4.54	3.93	4.43	2.86	3.85	3.99	4.44	4.44	4.13

Legend: Mean - arithmetic mean; Domain - research area, SUM - total mean value of all domains by sub-samples; D1 - domain of sports and health; D2 - domain sport as socializing and entertainment; D3 - domain of sports and learning behavior; D4 - domain of sports manipulation; D5 - domain sport and attitude towards other people; D6 - domain of sports and violence; D7 - domain sports and money; D8 - domain sport and work activity; D9 - domain sports and education; D10 - domain of sports and mental hygiene.

Analyzing the results by domains, fourth-year students have moderately positive attitudes for the domains "sports manipulation" (D4 = 3.93), "sports and money" (D7 = 3.85) and "sports and work activity" (D8 = 3.99). Students in the final year of study have more pronounced positive attitudes about the domains "sport and health" (D1 = 4.44), "sport as socializing and entertainment" (D2 = 4.34), "sport and learning behavior" (D3 = 4.54), "sport and attitudes towards other people" (D5 = 4.43), "sport and education" (D9 = 4.44), and "sport and mental hygiene" (D10 = 4.44). When it comes to first-year students, they express moderately positive attitudes towards the domains "sport manipulation" (D4 = 3.88) and "sport and work activity" (D8 = 3.83), while they have more positive attitudes towards the domains "sport and health" (D1 = 4.28), "sport as socializing and entertainment" (D2 = 4.18), "sport and learning behavior" (D3 = 4.38), "sport and attitudes towards other people" (D5 = 4.25), "sport and money" (D7 = 4.06), "sport and education" (D9 = 4.14), and "sport and mental hygiene" (D10 = 4.26).

Using the Mann-Whitney U Test and using statistical significance at the level of  $p < 0.05$ , differences were determined in attitudes between groups of first- and fourth-year students in ten different domains (Table 4).

**Table 4** Results of the Mann-Whitney U Test

	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9	D10
Mann-Whitney U	490.50	487.00	508.50	589.00	503.00	555.00	441.50	492.00	413.50	470.00
Wilcoxon W	1085.50	1082.00	1103.50	1184.00	1098.00	1221.00	1107.50	1087.00	1008.50	1065.00
Z	-1.44	-1.48	-1.23	-0.27	-1.33	-0.68	-2.02	-1.43	-2.40	-1.68
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.15	0.14	0.22	0.79	0.18	0.50	<b>0.04</b>	0.15	<b>0.02</b>	0.09

Legend: Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) - Statistical significance of differences (p); Z - value of approximation; D1 - domain of sports and health; D2 - domain sport as socializing and entertainment; D3 - domain of sports and learning behavior; D4 - domain of sports manipulation; D5 - domain sport and attitude towards other people; D6 - domain of sports and violence; D7 - domain sports and money; D8 - domain sport and work activity; D9 - domain sports and education; D10 - domain of sports and mental hygiene.

The Mann-Whitney U Test results showed that a statistically significant difference exists only in domains D7 and D9, while in most domains (D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6, D8, D10) no statistically significant difference in attitudes between first- and fourth-year students was detected. The attitudes of students are similar regarding the influence of sports on different domains of life, which is shown by the values of the median in Table 5.

**Table 5** Median values of student attitudes of both groups and total by domain

Year of study		D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7	D8	D9	D10
I year	N	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34	34
	Median	4.35	4.29	4.40	3.83	4.33	3.00	4.20	3.83	4.17	4.27
IV year	N	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36	36
	Median	4.50	4.29	4.60	4.00	4.33	3.00	3.80	4.00	4.33	4.45
Total	N	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
	Median	4.40	4.29	4.60	4.00	4.33	3.00	4.00	4.00	4.33	4.45

Legend: N - number of respondents; Median - the value of the median; D1 - domain of sports and health; D2 - domain of sport as socializing and entertainment; D3 - domain of sports and learning behavior; D4 - domain of sports manipulation; D5 - domain of sport and attitude towards other people; D6 - domain of sports and violence; D7 - domain of sports and money; D8 - domain of sport and work activity; D9 - domain of sports and education; D10 - domain of sports and mental hygiene.

## DISCUSSION

In accordance with the aim of the study, based on the analysis of the presented results, it can be concluded that there is no difference in the numerically expressed attitudes of first- and fourth-year students at this faculty. In general, fourth-year students have a slightly more positive attitude about the impact of sports on the health and improvement of mental hygiene of the student population than first-year students, when looking at the sum of arithmetic mean values ( $IVGSUM = 4.13 > IGSUM = 4.02$ ). A positive attitude of students about the impact of sports is expressed in most domains ( $3 > D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D7, D8, D9, D10$ ), i.e. in nine domains, and a negative attitude only in the domain of the impact and connection of sports activities with the occurrence of violence and the display of violent behavior in athletes (D6), which was more pronounced in fourth-year students ( $IG = 2.94; IVG = 2.86$ ). There was a minimal difference in the attitudes of the students in most of the surveyed domains, and the Mann-Whitney U Test showed that in

most domains this difference is not statistically significant. Using the Mann-Whitney U test, a statistically significant difference was determined in the attitudes of students at the  $p < 0.05$  level in the domains "sport and money" (D7;  $p = 0.04$ ) and "sport and education" (D9;  $p = 0,02$ ). Observing these two domains separately, the statistically significant difference in students' attitudes can be caused by the influence of the teaching program at the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education in Niš. Based on a detailed analysis of the results, it can be concluded that first- and fourth-year students generally have a very positive attitude about the impact of sports on the general health of the human body (IVGD1 = 4.44; IGD1 = 4.28). This attitude is in accordance with the claims of the authors of previous studies (Kordić & Babić, 2011; Čokorilo, & Mikalački, 2014), who claim that students highly value sports activities and are aware of the importance of sports on their lives, mental health and study practices. The results (IVGD10 = 4.44; IGD10 = 4.26) confirm the claims that students are aware of the need to increase their level of physical activity (Janković et al., 2017), and that activity is a significant factor in students' mental stability (Nešić, et al., 2019). Also, the attitudes of students in this research support the claims of authors of previous research that systematically enabling more intensive participation in sports of the student population can positively affect their socialization (Hadžikadunić, Softić, Novaković, Nurković, & Đedović, 2015), and raise their awareness about healthy lifestyles and the beneficial effects of sport on psycho-physical health (Nešić, et al., 2019; Detanac, Detanac, Čeranić, Đokić, & Milić, 2014; Stankov, Jovanović, & Starčević, 2017). It is said that it is never too late to adopt healthy living habits, and that a person is young as long as they can adopt healthy habits. Therefore, we must take advantage of the fact that by acquiring healthy lifestyle habits at a young age, we create the conditions for a better quality and happier life in the future (Jelenković & Jelenković, 2014). The results of the research indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in attitudes about the connection between sports and the material status of athletes, i.e. a more positive attitude of first-year students compared to fourth-year students on the impact of sports on individual economic status and potential financial gain. Also, it is necessary to point out the statistically significant difference and more positive attitudes of fourth-year students compared to first-year students on the effects of physical activities and sports in the educational process and the expressed wish to increase their number of practical classes, which may be the result of their educational background in areas of sports and participation in sports activities at the university. On the other hand, it can be concluded that any educational cycle is not possible at all without different forms of communication, which can be seen in practice.

#### CONCLUSION

Finally, the results of this study unequivocally confirmed the existence of a positive attitude among the student population about the impact of sports on health and the improvement of mental hygiene. It is necessary to point out the statistically significant difference and more positive attitudes of fourth-year students compared to first-year students about the effects of physical activities and sports in the education process itself and the expressed desire to increase the number of hours of practical classes, which may be the result of the students' educational background in the field of sports and participation in sports activities at the university. A detailed analysis of the results showed that there are no

statistically significant differences in most of the variables covered by testing (eight out of ten domains), i.e. that there is no significant difference in the attitudes of first- and fourth-year students regarding the importance of sports for their psycho-physical health. Also, all of the respondents agree or have adopted a unified position that sport is a form of verbal and non-verbal communication through which messages are sent and received. Therefore, we can conclude that first- and fourth-year students of the Faculty of Sports and Physical Education are aware of the role of sports in society and the positive impact of regular, planned and professionally led physical activities on their lives, socialization, mental and physical health and study. Based on the results and limitations of this cross-sectional, but also the conclusions of previous studies, recommendations for further research are reflected in increasing the sample of respondents, and including students from other faculties in the Republic of Serbia.

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## KOMUNIKOLOŠKI PRISTUP I STAVOVI STUDENATA O UTICAJU SPORTA NA ZDRAVLJE

Kao jedna od najosetljivijih populacija današnjice, kod koje je neohodno sagledavanje odnosa zdravlja i fizičke aktivnosti u cilju unapređenja kvaliteta života, označava se populacija studenata. Pored fizičke neaktivnosti, na zdravstveni status nepovoljno utiču i stalne tehnološke inovacije i prekomerni boravak na društvenim, konzumiranje alkohola, duvana i narkotika. Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je utvrđivanje razlika u komunikacijskom pristupu i stavovima studenata I i IV godine studija Fakulteta sporta i fizičkog vaspitanja o uticaju sporta na zdravlje i unapređenje mentalne higijene. Korišćenjem anketnog lista od 60 pitanja, istraživanje je obuhvatilo 70-oro zdravih ispitanika oba pola (Mean±SD: 20.86±1.76 years). Ispitanici su podeljeni na dva subuzorka, odnosno na grupu studenata prve godine (IG; n=34;  $\bar{Z}$ =15, M=19) i grupu studenata četvrte godine studija (IVG; n=36;  $\bar{Z}$ =18, M=18). Svi dobijeni podaci predstavljeni su parametrima deskriptivne. Pouzdanost ankete u smislu unutrašnje saglasnosti proveren je Cronbach's Alpha koeficijentom. Manifestni prostor stavova obrađen je tehnikom skaliranja. Za utvrđivanje razlika u stavovima između studenata prve i četvrte godine korišćen je Mann-Whitney U Test. Za statističku značajnost razlika u rezultatima između grupa, korišćen je nivo značajnosti od  $p < 0.05$ . Podaci su bili obrađeni u statističkom paketu SPSS. Rezultati istraživanja nedvosmisleno su potvrdili postojanje pozitivnog stava kod studentske populacije o uticaju sporta na zdravlje i unapređenje mentalne higijene, kao i da ne postoje statistički značajne razlike u većini testiranjem obuhvaćenih varijabli (osam od deset domena), odnosno da ne postoji velika razlika u stavovima studenata prve i četvrte godine studija o značaju sporta za njihovo psihofizičko zdravlje.

Ključne reči: fizička aktivnost, rekreacija, zdravi životni stil, vežbanje