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# Motives to take part in therapeutic physical activities of students with disabilities and health problems

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### Abstract

As an important part of healthy living, disease prevention and methods of coping with stress physical activity should be a priority subject for students with disabilities and health problems. This research shows that students taking part in therapeutic physical activities (rehabilitation, therapeutic gymnastics and yoga) are mainly focused on health and disease prevention. However, additional important motive, especially for healthier students, is the course completion, which is obligatory. The awareness of the students' needs and motives towards participating in therapeutic classes may allow to adjust the offer of Departments of Physical Education and Sport at Universities to their actual needs and capabilities.

**KEYWORDS:** disabled student, medical physical activities, motivation, physical education.

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### Introduction

Physical activity as a basis of functioning should be a lifelong pursuit especially for people with various disabilities. In this context physical education classes are immensely important at all education levels, including tertiary education. These lessons are supposed

to develop fitness and coordination, teach new motoric skills, equip a student with some knowledge regarding to taking care of their health and create motivation to be active [6, 7]. They are also essential in prophylaxis and therapy. Moreover, they influence emotional and motivational sphere, socializing skills and intellectual ability [9, 12]. An alternative to physical education classes are therapeutic activities, usually conducted by specialists in movement rehabilitation, which respond to special students' needs [11].

The School of Physical Education and Sport at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan (AMU) is responsible for conducting physical education classes. As an obligatory subject, it has to meet the needs of all students, including those with various disabilities. For that reason special physical education classes of therapeutic character have been introduced. Students with physiotherapy recommendations (with minor health problems) are offered a choice of therapeutic classes: gymnastics, swimming or yoga. Rehabilitation course (kinesiotherapy with elements of manual therapy) is dedicated to students temporarily unable to participate in any therapeutic classes (have undergone an injury, fracture, surgery, etc.). Students who cannot take part in any physical activities (because of diseases making any kind of movement impossible) are offered theoretical classes introducing the healthy lifestyle issues [13].

Physical education of people with disabilities is an issue often addressed in literature. Researchers usually place emphasis on inclusion, i.e. including students with disabilities into physical education classes together with their healthy counterparts [10]. Other issues are

individual needs of students and existing integration barriers [5]. There are studies into motivation and attitudes of physical education teachers in integration schools, teachers working with students with disabilities and attitudes of healthy students towards integration [4]. So far there are no studies regarding to motivation of students with disabilities to take part in therapeutic physical activities adopted to their needs. Therefore the objective of this study was to assess the motives of students with disabilities and health problems to take part in special physical activities of therapeutic character organized by The School of Physical Education and Sport at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The study aimed at comparing the general need to take part in therapeutic classes and analysing the specific motives to take part in one of three particular types of therapeutic activities.

### Material and Methods

Seventy first year students with disabilities and health problems took part in the study. The study was conducted in three research groups according to the type of therapeutic classes chosen by students. i.e.: rehabilitation classes (n = 23), therapeutic gymnastics (n = 24) and yoga (n = 23).

The proprietary questionnaire was used in the study. Apart from the personal data (faculty, age, sex, medical certificate of disability or existing health problem) it contained 12 closed questions, which allowed to determine his or her general need to participate in such classes and to evaluate individual motives to take part in particular classes. All closed questions required the use of ten-point scale, where 0 was understood as „completely unimportant”, 5 „of average importance” and 10 „the most important”.

The questionnaire proposed nine motives for participating in therapeutic classes: completing the course of physical education, improving health condition, maintaining good health condition (understood as disease prevention), maintaining proper body weight, ensuring attractive appearance, releasing stress and tension, gaining satisfaction, fostering and strengthening social bonds (friendships) and as a leisure pursuit.

To calculate the significance of differences between studied groups the one-way Anova with Bonferroni post-hoc test were used (Statistica 10.0).

### Results

The differences in the level of students' need of taking part in different therapeutic physical activities are shown in Figure 1. Students from the rehabilitation

group have the largest need to participate in therapeutic activities, while from yoga classes the smallest. The differences between the rehabilitation and yoga, as well as between the gymnastics and yoga groups are statistically significant.

**Figure 1.** Students' need of taking part in therapeutic physical activities. Values are given as means (10 ten-point scale) \*  $p \leq 0.05$

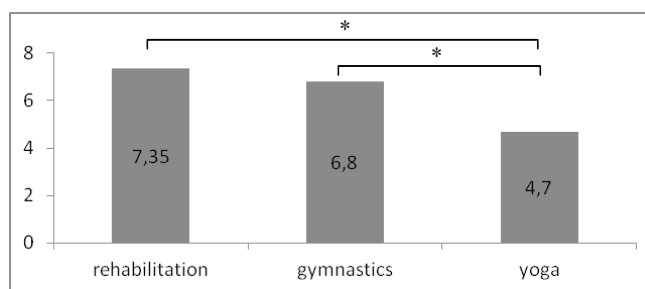
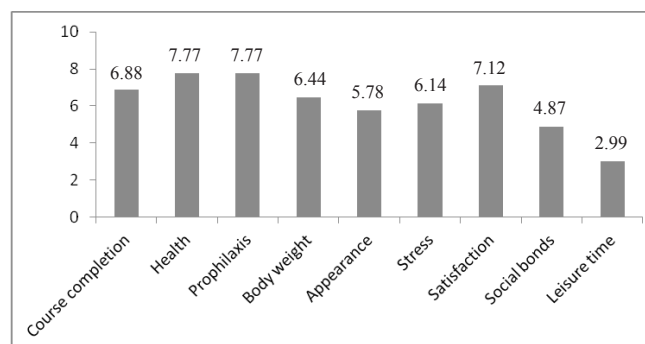


Figure 2 presents the motives of taking part in therapeutic physical activities organized by AMU of 70 first year students with disabilities and health problems. The most important motives were improving health condition disturbed by disease, maintain a good health condition as an element of prophylaxis along with gaining satisfaction and mental well-being (over 7 points). Completion of the course was also an important motive for participation in such classes (6.88). The least important turned out to be the motives connected with fostering social bonds and leisure pursuits.

**Figure 2.** Motives of students with disabilities and health problems to take part in therapeutic physical activities



More detailed information about motives of taking part in therapeutic physical activities are given in Table 1, where obtained answers are presented within three study groups. There are significant differences between analysed groups only in three proposed motives:

course completion (rehabilitation vs gymnastics), health (rehabilitation vs gymnastics and vs yoga) and prophylaxis (rehabilitation vs gymnastics).

**Table 1.** Motives to participate in therapeutic activities within rehabilitation, gymnastics and yoga groups

Motives	Rehabilitation	Gymnastics	Yoga
1. Course completion	5.57 §	7.54	7.52
2. Health	9.26 §#	6.83	7.22
3. Prophylaxis	8.83 §	6.83	7.65
4. Body weight	6.70	5.67	6.96
5. Appearance	5.48	5.04	6.83
6. Stress	5.52	5.50	7.39
7. Satisfaction	7.70	5.83	7.83
8. Social bonds	5.91	3.91	4.78
9. Leisure time	2.61	1.54	4.83

Values are given as means (10 ten-point scale).

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ ; § significantly different from gymnastics group; # significantly different from yoga group

## Discussion

There are many papers concerning motivation towards physical activity in healthy College/University students [2, 3, 8] and young people in general [1]. Out of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations authors often distinguish four main groups of motives – related to: health, beauty/appearance, enjoyment and challenge. In different age or sex groups results are very inconclusive. There are however, no studies concerning motivation towards therapeutic physical activities adopted to the needs of students with disabilities and health problems. The obtained results indicate that students with more serious medical indications (rehabilitation and gymnastics groups) have significantly stronger need to participate in therapeutic activities. This study also shows that students with disabilities and health problems do not treat the therapeutic physical activities as a leisure pursuit – this motivation was evaluated with the lowest ranks: the average of 2.99 points and 2.61, 1.54 and 4.83 by rehabilitation, gymnastics and yoga groups respectively.

For the rehabilitation group – consisting of students who were temporarily unable to participate in any physical education classes – the most important were the motives of health improvement and prophylaxis. At the third place those students have ranked satisfaction,

with very high score of 7.7 points. This result indicates that for people with serious health problems the possibility of regaining strength, physical condition and self-satisfaction are the most important motives for attending PE classes. For them issues like self-appearance or necessity of academic course completion were of small importance.

For the participants of therapeutic gymnastics' group similarly health improvement and prophylaxis were of substantial importance (both with 6.83 points), however the „course completion” got the highest note (7.54 points). Motives connected with satisfaction, body weight, stress coping and physical appearance are of average importance (5-6 points). In this group, the least significant, apart from leisure pursuit, was fostering and strengthening social bonds.

The responses of yoga group were quite consistent, apart from least important leisure pursuit and establishing social bonds with other mates, gaining satisfaction, improving health condition, completing the course, maintaining proper body weight, ensuring attractive appearance or releasing stress and tension were similarly rated (6.83-7.83 points). The motive of releasing stress and tension was much more important for students attending yoga classes than from other groups (5.52 in rehabilitation, and 5.50 in gymnastics), which can be explained by the specificity and the way of conducting yoga classes. The motive of completing the course was not rated the number one by yoga group, but the given note was almost equal to one given by gymnastics group (7.52 vs 7.54 points). It shows that students with minor health problems are more motivated towards PE classes by the need of completing the course.

In conclusion, this study shows that students with disabilities and health problems have different needs and various motives to take part in therapeutic physical activities and that there are significant differences in those aspects depending on the type of chosen classes. The awareness of the students' needs and motives towards participating in therapeutic classes may allow to adjust the offer of Departments of Physical Education at different Universities to their actual needs and capabilities.

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