

Summary

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The health status and health behaviour of university students

Schools are priority settings in health promotion forming the pupils not only by the contents of health-related subjects but by the knowledge, attitude and behaviour of all teachers as well as the overall atmosphere of the school. The aim of our research was to investigate the health and behaviour of future teachers, present students so as to identify problematic health and behaviour patterns. A specific aim was to characterize the mental health of students and its determinants that may be improved within higher education.

A questionnaire survey was carried out in two phases in six institutes of higher education providing teacher training as well. The first phase (pilot survey) was meant to answer methodological questions in student groups that were not to be involved in the later survey. The second phase or main survey aimed to investigate the health and health behaviour of future teachers who were randomly selected from the above mentioned six institutes of higher education.

The paper-based and internet version of the survey tool was developed and tested in the pilot phase that included among others the translation and validation of the abbreviated version of the Orientation to Life questionnaire, measuring sense of coherence as defined by Aaron Antonovsky. A fast and cost-effective data collection method providing acceptable response rate was also developed based on the results of the pilot phase. The pilot provided evaluable results regarding the health and behaviour of 1-5 year medical students of the University of Debrecen. According to these, notable psychological stress was found to be 75% higher among medical students than in the general population of similar age-range.

The health and behaviour of future students was investigated in the main survey according to which the proportion highly stressed students was twice as high as that of the similar age-group of the general population. However, the proportion of nonsmoking and alcohol non-using students was found to be significantly higher compared to those of similar age in the general population. No significant institutional differences were detected among students of various universities included in the study in terms of health and health behaviour.

Multivariate analysis was used to build a model for key determinants of mental health that were found to be age and social support. Increasing age and social support decrease psychological stress and improve sense of coherence.

In conclusion, it is of great concern that university students including future teachers demonstrate signs of unfavourable mental health compared to the general population of the same age-range. However, social support as a major determinant of health can be identified as a potential factor for intervention even within institutes of higher education. Mental health can be monitored by the cost-effective method developed. In order to improve the health of our future intelligentsia, mental health promotion of university students should be a high priority.

Keywords: health status, health behaviour, higher education, university students, mental health, sense of coherence, psychological stress

Kulcsszavak: egészségi állapot, egészségmagatartás, felsőoktatás, egyetemi hallgatók, lelki egészség, koherencia-érzés, pszichés stressz