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SURVEY ON THE EMPLOYEES'  
FITNESS CONDITION AND THE  
EMPLOYERS' HEALTH  
PRESERVATION POSSIBILITIES  
IN CASE OF SMALL AND  
MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES

Quantitative  
study

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**Keywords**

*Employees' health,  
Physical inactivity,  
Small medium enterprises*

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**JEL Classification**

M10

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**Abstract**

*Consideration of the employees' health preservation results in direct cost savings at corporate level by decreasing the measure of sick leave and ensuring the continuous and smooth production. Nowadays, ensuring the health of labour force has already become an employer interest, of course, in addition to that it is also the interest of everyone. In our research, we have asked employees of Hungarian small and medium-sized enterprises in the framework of questionnaire survey. It was clearly apparent that the physical activity of workers has to be enhanced and their sporting activities have to be supported. According to the results of our research, these types of organizations support the health protection of their employees, moreover in financing form of allowances primarily.*

## Introduction

International and domestic studies have verified that huge amounts can be saved at national economy level by decreasing the physical inactivity. If health status of the population demonstrably improves then it will increase the productivity and will decrease the measure of social expenditures related to health status and thereby a positive effect will prevail with regard to the economic growth as well. In this context, strategies relating to the enhancement of physical activity have been created in several member countries of the European Union; these ones have placed the main emphasis on the health preservation at work (physical inactivity) and the advancement of well-being (Ács et al., 2010). Consideration of the employees' health preservation results in direct cost savings at corporate level as well, by decreasing the measure of sick leave and ensuring the continuous and smooth production. Our aim is to survey the fitness condition of employees of small and medium-sized enterprises (hereinafter referred to as SMEs) and to compare it to the corporate possibilities ensuring workplace well-being. The results can determine what practice the organizations of this type are conducting in connection with their employees' health preservation.

### 1. Literature review

Physical exercise is a biological necessity just like eating or sleeping. This is proved by the established fact that the lack of physical exercise also plays role in development of more and more diseases that are leading with regard to the causes of death (e.g. heart and circulation diseases, neoplastic diseases, type 2 diabetes). Nowadays, it is already a scientific fact that the regular exercise can also offer a solution to the endemic depression. It is reinforced by the examinations of Deutsch and Gergely (2015), according to which the first five most frequently used methods among the forms surmounting stress include sport as well.

Over recent years, use of phrase 'wellness' has become fashionable in connection with the health-conscious way of life. The word 'wellness' was created by fusing the words 'well-being' and 'wholeness' which means the lack of disease in the stricter sense. However, its meaning is much wider in the health science researches. According to the definition of Ardell (1985), wellness is a lifestyle, views of life, philosophy of life, a conscious effort for the existence. It includes the commitment to a healthy, active and long life, thereby it is a one-word term for the health-conscious way of life (Borbély-Müller, 2008). Thus, this is a life form directed at reaching a physically optimal condition beside the mental/psychic well-being. Aim of wellness is to stabilize the function of the human body and to enhance its capability of resistance. By

means of it, stress reduction and attainment of well-being become learnable processes. During these processes, those decisions can become attainable by means of which the realization of a better quality of life can be forecasted. A key item of these decisions is applying to the regular exercise.

The companies are increasingly recognising that health and well-being of their employees are such values in which they have to invest to obtain advantages in the long term. Every company strives to operate well. If the sense of health and well-being of the employees is good then it can organically contribute to the good performance, productivity, the organization's profit, success and efficiency. Consequently, the support and promotion of the subjective well-being of workers have an economic advantage since the rate of absence, staff turnover and quitted workers will be smaller. Costs arising from the dissatisfaction or other problems of the employees are almost imperceptibly but closely linked to the absence causing the reduction of productivity, early retirement and work leaving. Summing up, well-being becomes more and more significant in the context of work and the organization (Kun, 2010). The workplace well-being is a theoretical, mainly sociological and psychological construction. Primary aim of creating this research area was to measure the employees' performance (Hidvégi-Müller, 2009). Numerous factors are acting on the performance of an employee, starting from the independence through the labour relations (Móré, 2012), synchronization of the work and private life (Bencsik-Juhász, 2011) until the stress arising from work.

According to Karasek (1979), workplace stress can be found when a worker has no possibility to influence his/her own working conditions under excessive work burden. However, according to Siegrist (2009), it can also appear if there is no proportionality between the work effort invested by an employee and the reward given – or not given – for the work effort. Houtman et al. (2007) determines the generally accepted definition of workplace stress as “a kind of physiological, emotional, cognitive and behavioural pattern which appears as a reaction to certain burdensome components of the contents of work, the organization itself or the working environment”.

The examinations regarding the job satisfaction, in parallel with the stress research, had already been taking place since the end of the 1930s (Szombathelyi, 2012). Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) initially examined the relation between the performance and the job satisfaction. Spector (1997), then Robertson and Taylor (2008) researched the satisfaction from the perspective of employees. They wondered what those factors were by means of which the workers' sense of

satisfaction with the work can be increased i.e. what determines if someone likes his/her job or not. In HR practice of nowadays, we can identify numerous good-bad exercises for the close relationship between the personal and workplace well-being, the work performance and the working environment. It was realized if the employees feel comfortable at the workplace, they stay there with pleasure, there are communal spaces and places suitable for standing away, well-equipped kitchen and canteen as well as the environment is inspirational and varied then the employees hardly notice that they are not in home environment thus they work with pleasure and well thereby they can reach a better work performance and a more effective operation of the organization (IS.05.). The attribute 'family-friendly' is given to those organizations where the company family day-care facilities/crèches support the transition of mothers with young children to work. Today, animal-friendly companies can also be found where the accommodation of pet favourites contributes to the motivation of workers.

We can state that realization of the worker-friendly company culture already becomes a target area of the HR strategy of both the smaller firms and the bigger, multinational corporations.

Of course, however good the working environment and workplace atmosphere are, the most important guarantee of the organizational well-being is the healthy labour force. Ensuring and retaining the healthy labour force have become both personal, namely employer, and organizational, namely corporate, interests.

One pillar of ensuring health is the exercise, the physical activity. In this regard, there are still things to be done since 59% of the EU citizens never or rarely do sports while 41% of them engage in physical exercise at least once a week, according to the Eurobarometer survey of 2014. According to the survey, the people are more active physically in the northern part of Europe than in the southern or eastern countries. In Sweden, 70% of the respondents have stated that they do sports at least once a week (IS.02.). Denmark (68%), Finland (66%), the Netherlands (58%) and Luxemburg (54%) are also in the upper part of the ranking.

Bulgaria is at the very bottom of the list: 78% of the persons questioned never engage in physical exercise. The situation is not much better in Malta (75%), Portugal (64%), Rumania (60%) and Italy (60%). Hungary (44%) is barely below the EU average.

## 2. Material and method

During our research, by means of quantitative method, we have collected data about the physical condition of employees of Hajdú-Bihar County without restriction of age group, qualification and position. We have worded only one criterion during

the investigation: the person completing the questionnaire shall be an active employee. By means of the questionnaire method, we have interviewed 150 persons and 119 of this sample could be assessed and utilized. The gender ratio of respondents is almost 50-50% since 62 women and 57 men answered the questions. In order to determine the age of persons questioned, we have created categories in accordance with the different generation markings. According to this, 8 of the members of generation Z, 34 of generation Y, 58 of generation X while 19 persons of future pensioners have completed the questionnaire. The employees' distribution by position shows that there were 11 high-level managers, 18 medium-level managers and 14 low-level managers in the sample. There were 44 white-collar employees and 32 blue-collar workers in the research.

We have processed the results of the quantitative survey by means of the program package SPSS 23.0. In order to make the processing more effective, the evolved series of questions contained closed questions with certain exceptions. There were equally alternative-, selective- and scale-type questions in the questionnaire. In the course of evolving, we have applied different scale techniques in order to get to know the employees' sports habits. Due to the statistical evaluation, we have used interval scale where there was possibility to do so, e.g. for measuring the motivation, attitude or popularity. Based on self-declarations, the questions have concerned the quality and extent of the physical activity as well as the employees' attitude to sports.

## 3. Results

Figure 1 shows the physical activity of employees working in the SME sector, from which it can be established that, by their own admission, 53% of them do not do any sporting activity while 32% of the persons questioned voluntarily engage in active physical exercise for sporting. 15% of them did not answer this question so this group would very likely increase the rate of "doing no sports" as well. At Hungarian level, this result of the employees involved in the research is below the average of Eurobarometer 2014, according to which 44% of the population of our country do sports at least once a week (IS.01.). It may be explained by that Eurobarometer represents the whole population and the younger age groups exercising more actively can improve the value of investigation while the present survey focuses on one segment, namely the active workers, who already assess their life style in working life based on other criteria.

The low level of physical activity is explained well by how the respondents have declared about their time spent in work. According to this, 16% of the persons questioned spend 9-10 hours, 8% of them spend 10-12 hours and other 2% spend more than

12 hours at the workplace i.e. 26% of them work more than 8 hours a day.

We have obtained the same explanation when we were searching for the cause of neglecting the sporting. According to Figure 2, 48% of the persons completed the questionnaire have no time to do exercise. Only 5% of them consider it to be too expensive, 2% miss the mates, there is no available sports establishment close to 1% of them and 5% are hindered by disease or injury. Demotivation for sporting activity is indicated by that 38% of them do not adduce any argument as reason of inactivity as well as 5% even refuse to do sport activities.

It is interesting to compare these results to the result of the 7-day short version of IPAQ (International Physical Activity Questionnaire) fitness test (Bajsz et al., 2014) answered as a part of the questionnaire; this is contained by Table 1.

This shows a much more favourable image than the persons questioned have thought about themselves. According to the test, (even though 29% have not answered this question) 19% have minimal activity based on their identified exercises and 47% of them have health-improving activity. Namely, the respondents have reached the active level – it is true that they did so by means of “mixed” forms of exercises (e.g. walking, moderate and brisk exercises) rather than “brisk” sporting activities exclusively. It ensues from the result that the employees questioned perform moving activities (walk, cycling, walking dogs etc.), there is lag preferably in case of activities of sporting purposes expressly.

On Figure 3, we can see the answers of respondents about how their working activities are influencing their physical conditions. It turned out that 25% of them think that their work influences their physical conditions very much, the influence is significant in opinion of 22% and other 22% think that the influence is full i.e. they work in sitting or standing position as well as their tasks involve a more serious physical burden.

Compound of the examination sample has determined that persons performing intellectual activity were mainly involved in the present examination. The long-term sitting work is burdensome in case of them. Figure 4 proclaims that 32% of them perform sitting activity for 2-5 hours, 29% of them for 5-8 hours and 13% for 9 or much more hours. The most obvious solution for compensating the lengthy sitting activity is to perform some physical activity, exercise or sporting activity. (Such exercises are available for compensating the sitting work that can be performed in working environment and have been elaborated from point of view of health maintenance).

Today, the employers are already aware of the beneficial effect of physical activity. According to

a human political research of 2013, many companies recognized that the healthy employees play serious role in achieving the business goals that is why numerous organizations of this kind has placed the health improvement among the strategic-level HR priorities. These companies consider the health condition of workers as an investment and they strive for long-term solutions in order to retain the employees' health (IS.04.). At preparing this research, we have supposed that this HR strategy is more peculiar to the large multinational corporations. Nevertheless, we have been surprised to experience that this intention can be observed in case of SMEs as well.

Figure 5 shows that there is a kind of activities supporting the workplace physical activity in case of 70% of the questioned employees working in the SME sector and 30% of them mean that this activity has an explicitly huge significance.

By means of an open question, we have also asked what form this supporting activity appears in. The answers have showed that the employees are principally thinking in forms of allowance financing forms. As a part of the Cafeteria system, the companies give their workers personal sport season tickets and they provide the employees with health survey and consultation services (manager and worker screenings).

It was very typical that the enterprises ensure the use of sport facilities in order to motivate the workers' physical activity. Its form can be that a firm concludes an agreement ensuring sport season tickets (ALL YOU CAN MOVE SportPass-card) integrating hundreds of sport facilities and exercise forms or, in a simpler case, the firm agrees with local sport establishments on using any establishment. We have examined SMEs so it was not peculiar that the organization has own sports ground or gym but, overall, the firms of 20% of the employees questioned ensured use of sport facilities in some form.

Of course, organizing corporate health- or sport days is also peculiar to numerous organizations. 26% of the respondents have indicated that there are events of this kind, there are no events of this kind in case of 66% and 8% of them has no information about whether events are or not. Most companies organize these events on a yearly basis.

## Conclusions

In our research, we have presented the fitness condition of employees of the Hungarian SMEs via a smaller examination sample in order to compare it to the activity supporting the workplace well-being of the employees of this sector. We have stated that the examined group of the SME employees performs exercise pertaining to physical activity but this does not mean an active sporting activity mostly. The reason for lag of sporting activity is mostly the lack of time which is also

buttressed up by the overwork of a significant part of the persons questioned.

The persons questioned would need a fortiori physical activity since it should compensate the long-term desk job.

We were pleased to find that SMEs take care to maintain the health of their employees since they provide their workers with sport season tickets for using sport facilities as well as SMEs organize sport events on a yearly basis.

### Summary

Main task of the human resource management is to ensure the required labour force needs for the organization. Numerous organizations have experienced that it is not only hard to obtain good labour force but to retain it. We cannot reckon retaining only as keeping the labour force locally i.e. at the workplace but protecting their health. It is easy to see that the leave of a well-performing labour force – due to not only job changes but also possibly sickness – could lead to serious costs. Nowadays, ensuring the health of labour force has already become an employer interest, of course, in addition to that it is also an own interest of everyone.

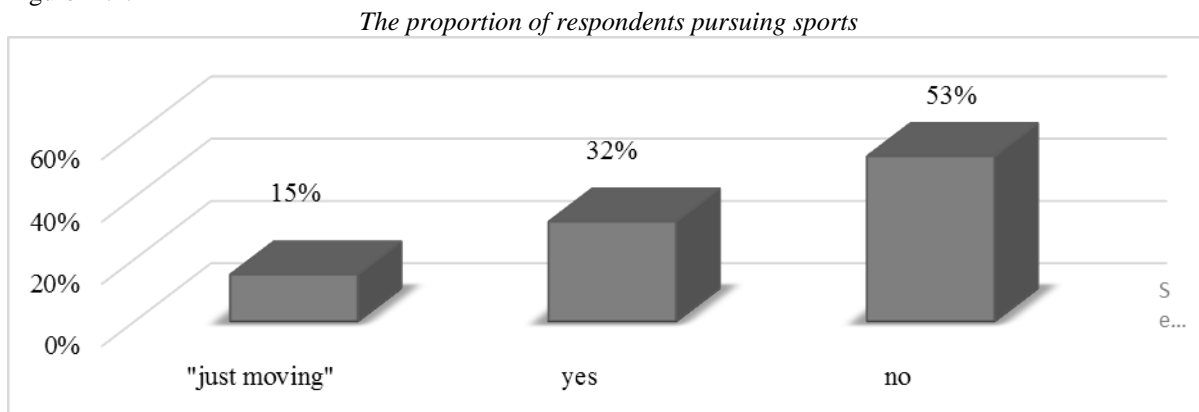
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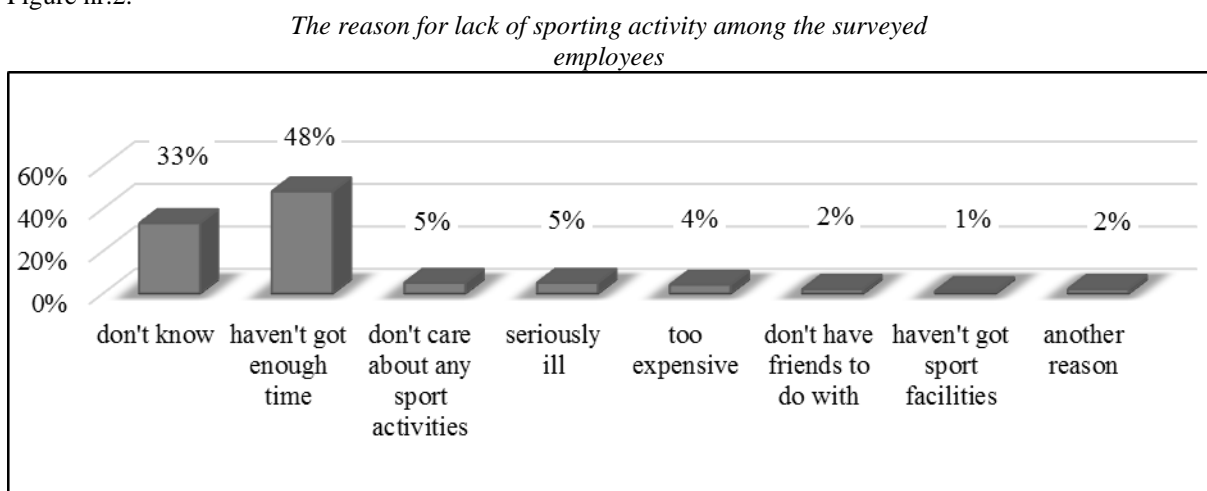
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Figure nr.1.



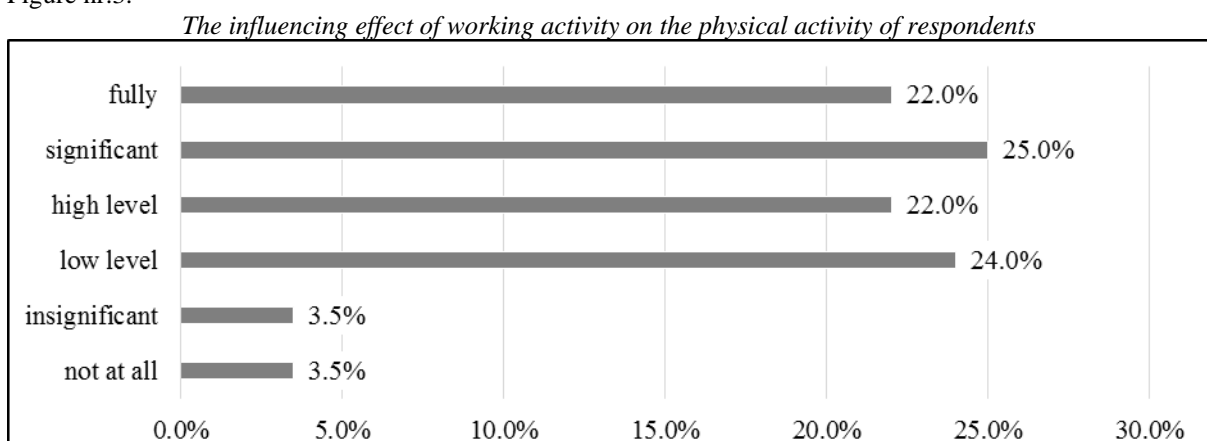
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Figure nr.2.



Source: Own edition

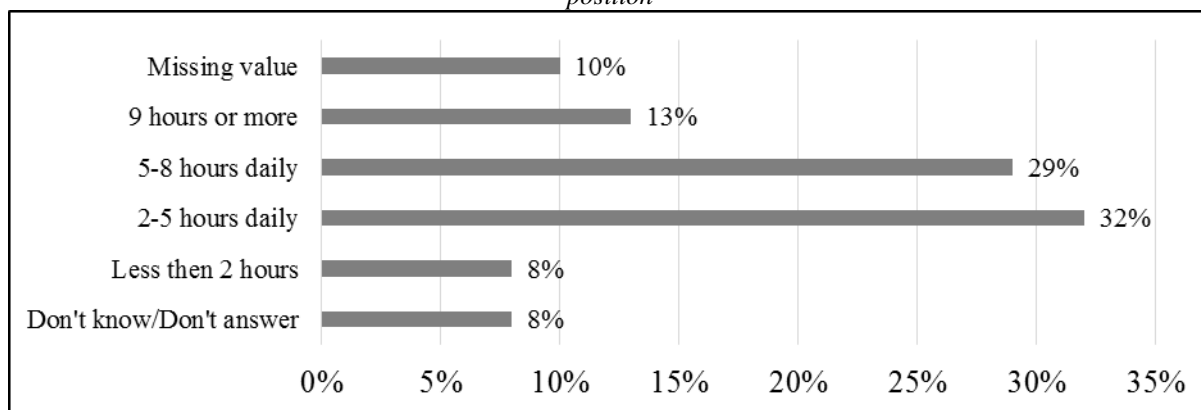
Figure nr.3.



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Figure nr.4.

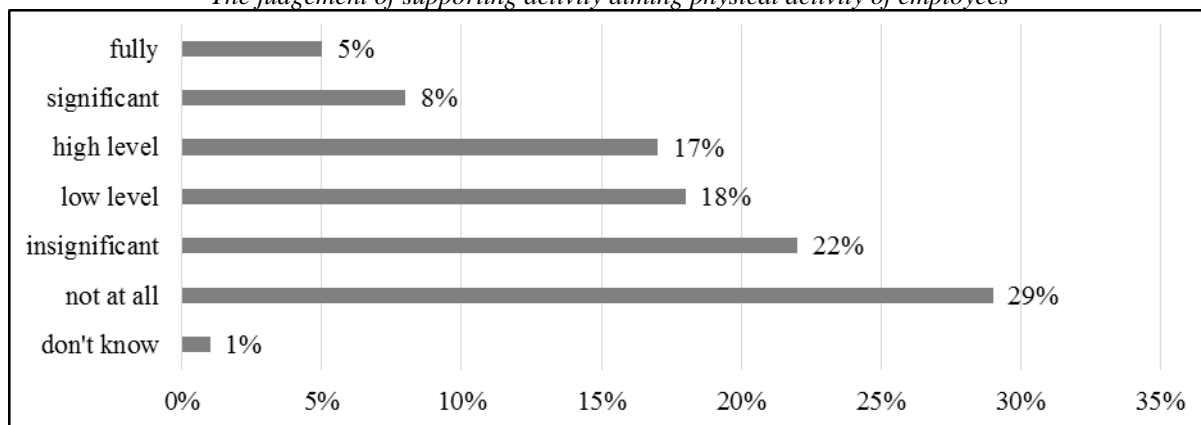
*The respondents' daily period spent in sitting position*



Source: Own edition

Figure nr.5.

*The judgement of supporting activity aiming physical activity of employees*



Source: Own edition

Table nr.1.

*The respondents' results of the IPAQ fitness tests*

FITNESS	It was ONLY vibrant movement	It was a lively , moderate walking exercise MIXED	Sum	Distribution
Total inactivity	1	5	6	5%
Minimal inactivity	1	21	22	19%
Recreation activity	9	47	56	47%
Don't answer			35	29%
Sum			119	100%

Source: Own edition