



## A STUDY OF ACQUIRED HARMFUL HABITS AT 15-16-YEAR-OLD STUDENTS

P. Dikova\*

Department Heavy Athletics, Boxing, Fencing and Sport for All, Sector Sport for All,  
National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski", Sofia, Bulgaria

### ABSTRACT

Childhood and adolescence is the time when life-long habits are acquired. The bad habits acquired at this age reflect on the physical and mental health of the individual. They mark a negative contribution to the development of serious health problems in middle and senior age.

Some of the most harmful bad habits are smoking, alcohol consumption and drug use, low physical activity, and the recently quite modern addiction to the Internet and social networks.

To examine the extent to which bad habits are part of the lives of 15-16-year-old boys and girls, we conducted an anonymous survey among 248 students. The issues and questions were related to smoking, alcohol, drugs and aggressive behavior.

The analysis of the data revealed that harmful dependencies are more or less part of their lives. The results of this survey revealed a minor decrease in the number of smokers from year to year. Unfortunately, alcohol consumption by students is increasing. The lowest is the percentage of those, who have tried any drugs. Most often, aggression manifests itself in fighting and with increasing age among the respondents, the tendency declines the percentage of positive responses among boys, whereas it increases significantly among girls.

**Key words:** alcohol, smoking, narcotic substances, aggression, violence, adolescents

### INTRODUCTION

It is known that in childhood and adolescence are formed and built habits that remain for life. Once built and established habits are difficult to change and when they are harmful they are even more difficult to be overcome. The harmful habits acquired at this age reflect on the physical, mental and health development of the individual. They make a negative contribution to the emergence of serious health problems in middle and old age. Building basic health habits occur in childhood and youth, but at this time, some harmful and dangerous to health aspects of behavior were unlocked, aspects who leads to future chronic diseases (1).

The term "harmful habit" characterizes those manifestations in the behavior of an individual

that leads to negative social and health consequences. Some of the most harmful habits are smoking, alcohol and drug use, low physical activity, lack of sleep, and modern in recent years, addiction to the Internet and social networks (2-9). In order to live in a healthy environment, there is a need for harmony between our physical and mental health. This is possible when we have made the right choice of the habits and activities we carry out in our daily lives that characterize our lifestyle, including knowing all the harm to our physical and psychological development from smoking, alcohol and drugs usage.

The above-mentioned harmful habits are one of the major risk factors for human health. In most cases, they also provoke acts of aggressive behavior inside and outside the school. Family and school as an institution have a major role in preventive actions. It is necessary both to join their efforts in order to grow children healthy, educated, well informed, and understanding the destructive effects of harmful habits.

\*Correspondence to: Petia Dikova, National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski", Department Heavy athletics, boxing, fencing and sport for all, Sector Sport for all, 1700, Sofia, Bulgaria, Studentski grad, 21, Acad. Stefan Mladenov str., E-mail: [petiamilanova@gmail.com](mailto:petiamilanova@gmail.com), GSM: +359893396470

## METHODS

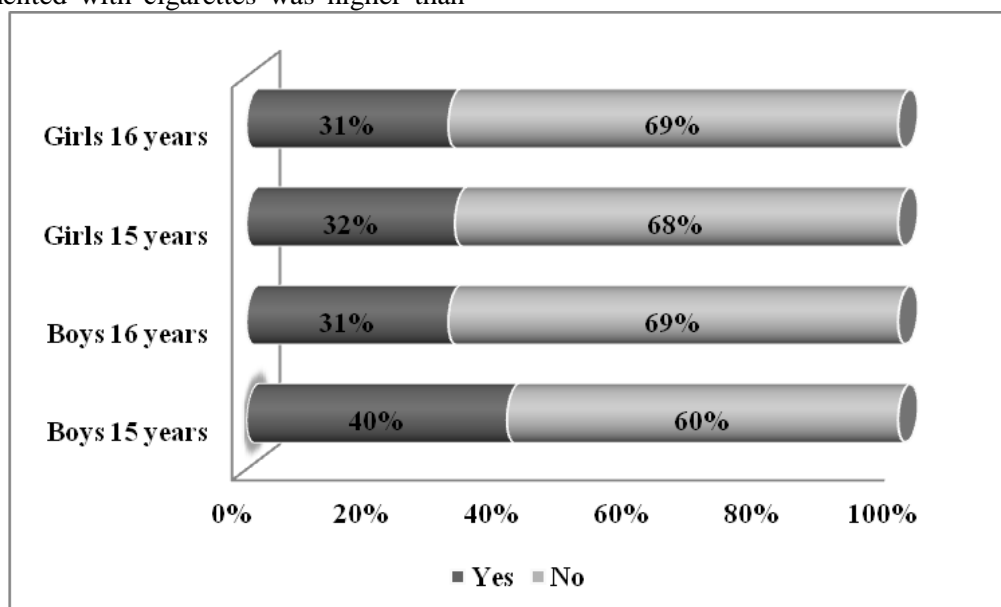
In order to study to what extent the harmful habits are part of the lives of 15-16-year-old students, we conducted an anonymous questionnaire, which involved 111 girls and 137 boys. The questions they answered were related to smoking, alcohol, drugs and aggressive behavior.

A number of authors have examined the problem of smoking in school-age (10-13). Their findings confirmed the trend in recent years of increasing the number of smokers from early childhood and adolescence. The results of a study conducted by the National Center for Public Health and Analyses, 2015, confirmed the relevance of the problem of smoking in school age. It was determined that "more than 30% of Bulgarian students tried to smoke", with "the relative share of girls who experimented with cigarettes was higher than

that of boys - 40% versus 35%. In addition, 28% of girls and 21% of boys are current smokers. Smoking is significantly more prevalent among 15-19-year-olds - 38% than among 10-14-year-olds - only 6%. Among the smokers aged 10-14, boys predominate, and among those aged 15-19 - girls."

## RESULTS

The results of this survey among 248 students in the age range of 15-16 years reveal a slight decrease in the number of smokers from year to year. For 15-year-old girls, the percentage of those who tried to smoke was 32%, which dropped by one point to 16-year-olds. Affirmatively are answered 40% of the boys aged 15, and the 16-year-old boys in our sample tried to smoke are as many as their coeval - 31% (**Figure 1**). No differences by gender were observed.



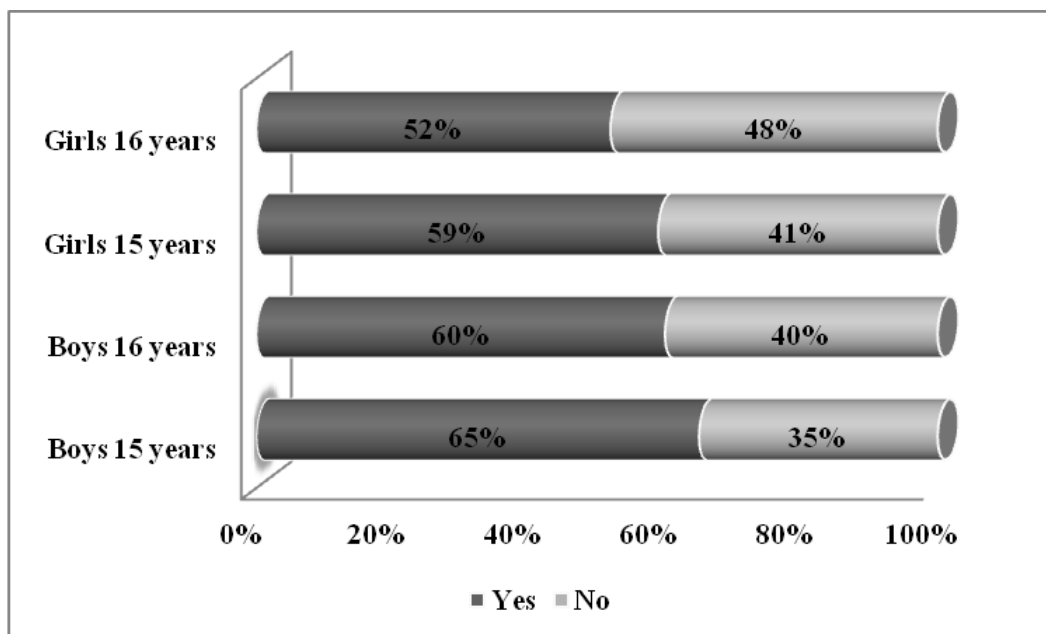
**Figure 1.** Answers to the question "Have you ever tried smoking (even one or two puffs out)?"

In our 2011 survey of 450 students aged 15-16, to the question "Have you ever tried smoking (even one or two puffs out of cigarette)" more than half of the students surveyed answered it affirmatively (14). For the time being, we want to believe that there is a change in a positive direction about the harm of smoking among students and due to this fact is the decline in tobacco consumption.

The next question concerns alcohol use. According to data provided by the NSI for the 2014 European Health Interview, Bulgarian students are among the leaders in 7alcohol use – 86%. The established frequency of drinking

at least one drink is 7 times on average per month, compared to 5.4 times for Europe.

Unfortunately, the use of alcohol by students is increasing (15). This is also indicated by the data from our study. The results of the survey are disturbing. The percentage of drinking alcohol among our 15-16-year-old students is unreasonable high (**Figure 2**). Much more disturbing is the fact that the percentage differences between boys and girls who consumed alcohol were negligible. There is a tendency with increasing age to increase the share of students who do not use alcohol.



**Figure 2.** Answers to the question "Have you ever drunk more than 1-2 sips of alcohol?"

Probably this harmful performance is driven by a sense of belonging to the group, fear of rejection, and satisfaction with imitation. This is generally a display of rebellion against established standards of behavior in school, family and society. Lack of parental control and inadequate communication with children in the family is one of the main causes of alcohol use in childhood and adolescence.

We believe that the reason is not only in the liberal purchasing regime of alcoholic beverages for students. The main problem at this age is the consumption of beer, which students almost accept as a refreshing drink. Whether they get drunk with beer, vodka, whiskey or other alcohol, the consequences are the same. This is the information that teens need to know! And that is why it is necessary to find means for the prevention of this harmfulness in order not to become habits.

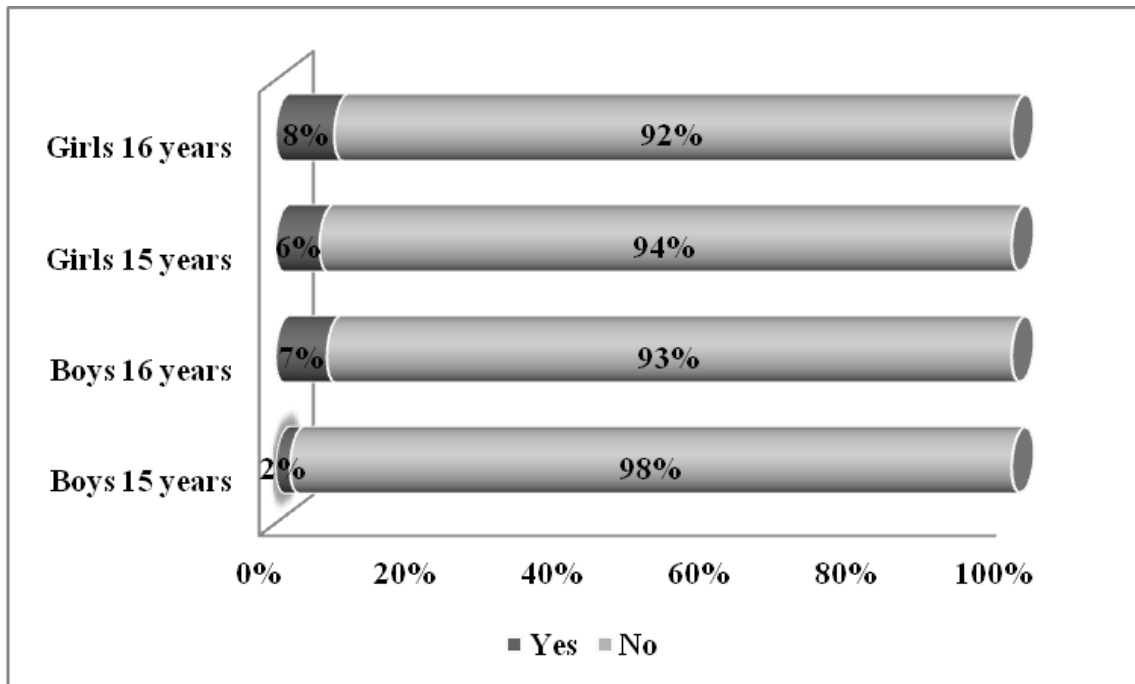
No less acute is the problem of drugs and psychoactive substances use. In recent years, the number of people with drug addiction has steadily increased. Adolescents are particularly susceptible to harmful effects of different nature. The reasons are various and the study of this problem requires a complex approach. The factors that influence whether to take or not drugs are bidirectional – risk-taking and protective. Risk factors of great importance include unhealthy family environment, lack of trust, support, understanding of children by parents and lack of genuine emotional relation between them, high parental ambitions for success, which almost always leads to the

formation of insecurity and inferiority complexes in their child, etc. On the other hand are the protective factors that make up strong interpersonal relationships within and outside the family, the child's valuable personal qualities such as self-confidence, ability to defend one's own opinion and make decisions, personal and collective responsibility, the ability for classroom and extracurricular workshops, etc. (16, 17).

In our study, there was one case of drug use by a boy of 15 and at 16-year-old boys, 6 tried drugs. Eight girls responded positively – four of each age group (**Figure 3**). The low percentage of children tried drugs should not calm us. Of all 248 students surveyed, a total of 15 stated use.

In our point of view, the main influence on these processes is exerted by the environment in which children live and their acceptance or rejection by the group in which they belong. We do not underestimate the curiosity factor which in most cases drives them to experiment with drugs.

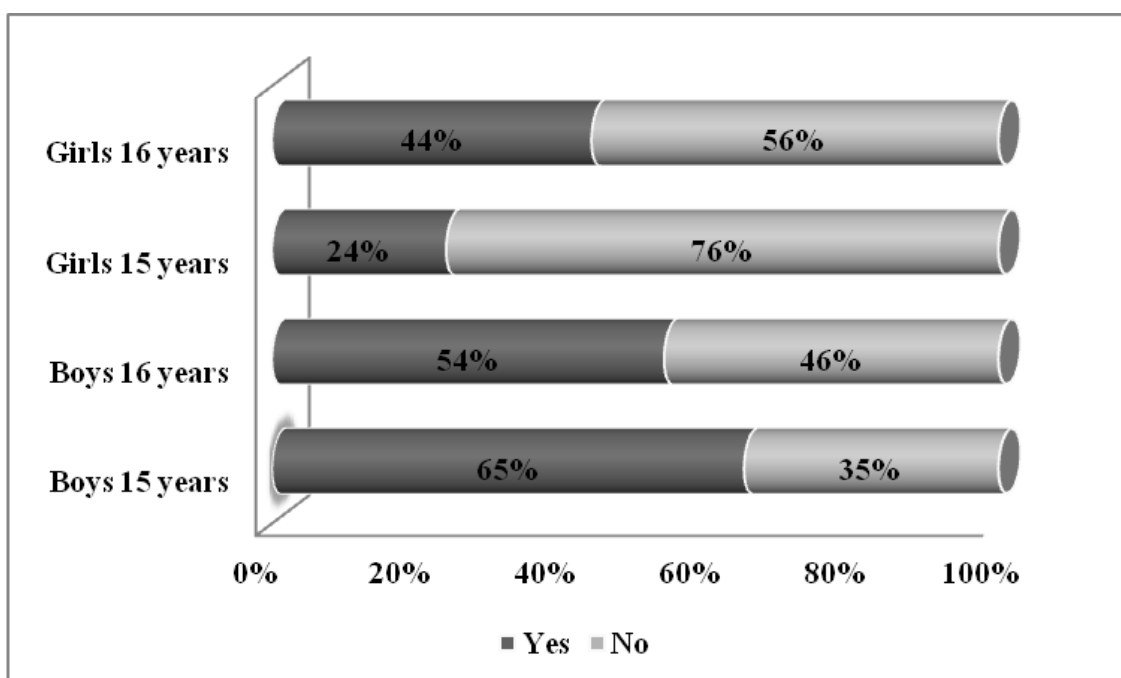
It is well known that the uncontrolled contact with computer games, internet sites, etc. from an early age forms a distorted attitude towards basic human values. The violence radiating from the screen is perceived as natural to imitate. The results of researches by a number of specialists prove the detrimental effect on the mental development of adolescents from addiction to various electronic games and the Internet.



**Figure 3.** Answers to the question "Have you ever used any drug (marijuana, cocaine, heroin, glues, steroid pills, etc.)?"

Psychologists rank the Internet and social networks as addictions. They obsess the time of the modern human being, which in many cases has a detrimental effect on his way of life. The extremes that can be reached are many: loss of interest in the world outside the net, a drastic reduction in actual, real social contacts; minimizing the basic necessities of sleep and food; imprisonment in a fictional, parallel world and many more that ultimately damage the physical and mental health of the individual (18-20). In most cases, all this leads

to aggressive performances of various forms in childhood and adolescence. We encounter them on a daily basis at school, on the street, etc., which is an expression of the desire to prove strength and dominance over classmates. Most often, aggression is manifested in a fight, whether individually or in groups, only boys, girls or in general are involved. The results of our survey of 15-16-year-old boys and girls can be found in the answers to the question "Have you ever participated in a fight?" (**Figure 4**).



**Figure 4.** Answers to the question "Have you ever participated in a fight?"

We observe an interesting trend among the cases we survey. With increasing age, the percentage of positive responses among boys decreases, while it increases significantly in girls. The dynamics of change at age of 16 go in the direction of balancing positive and negative responses for both genders. The most aggressive students among respondents are 15-year-olds - 65% of them answered Yes. Although the limited number of children surveyed, these results are alarming.

At this age, imitation is one of the main forms of behavior. When they are educated in a spirit of camaraderie, respect, respect for the manifestations of the weaker, mutual assistance, tolerance towards other, regardless of success and diversity, then the aggressive manifestation will be minimized.


### CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the data from the survey among 15-16-year-old students revealed that the harmful dependencies to a small or greater extent are present in their lives. In the least cases, they have tried any drugs – a total of 15 boys and girls, accounting for 6% of the total aggregation tested. The percentage of affirmative answers regarding the use of nicotine products and alcohol has increased significantly, reaching respectively over 30% and over 50%. No significant gender differences were observed. Participants in fights are 58.4% of boys and 32.4% of girls.

In our opinion, family and school, where the foundations of education in a spirit of companionship, mutual assistance, correctness and tolerance, play a major role in prevention. Somewhere, the link between school and family is broken, as a result of which many parents do not receive timely information about their children's indecent behavior. This naturally affects the implementation of timely, and effective measures to make the necessary adjustments to the behavior and interpersonal communication of their children at school.

### REFERENCES

1. Miloshova, E., Healthy lifestyle – a survey among young Bulgarians. Proceeding book of the International Congress “*Applied Sports Sciences*” Sofia, pp. 288-291, 2017.
2. Alexandrova, M., Vasilev, M., General picture of drug addiction among young people in Bulgaria. *Practical Pediatrics* 6/2002.

3. Manolova, A., Prevalence of school-age smoking – results of the Global Survey of Smoking among Young People in Bulgaria. 2004.
4. Manshonov, N., The importance of physical activity for preserving and strengthening the mental health of adolescents. *Physical medicine, rehabilitation, health*, 4/2005.
5. Mumdjiev, M., Yordanov, Y., Nedkova, V., Angelova, Y., Smoking and the child. *Hygiene and healthcare* – XLI, 4/1998.
6. Popov, G., Preventive principles regarding drug use in children and adolescents. *Practical pediatrics*. 3/2006.
7. <https://dariknews.bg/regioni/varna/bylgarskite-tijnejdzhyri-otlichnici-po-narkotici-alkohol-i-anaboli-1615992> (accessed 20 Mart 2020).
8. <https://www.nsi.bg/>  EHS2014.pdf (accessed 20 Mart 2020)
9. [https://theconversation.com/smoking-harms-not-just-your-physical-health-but-your-mental-health-too-69021?utm\\_campaign=Echobox&utm\\_medium=Social&utm\\_source=Twitter#link\\_time=1479995129](https://theconversation.com/smoking-harms-not-just-your-physical-health-but-your-mental-health-too-69021?utm_campaign=Echobox&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#link_time=1479995129) (accessed 20 Mart 2020).
10. Panayotov, A., Stoimenova, D., Stoyneva, Y., Ivanova, Tzv., Annual report on the problems related to drugs and drug addiction in Bulgaria. S. 2017.
11. Tsoleva, G. et al. Smoking - a risk factor for children's health. *Social Medicine*, 14/2006.
12. <http://roditel.bg/pushene-tsigari-detsa-statistika/> (accessed 20 Mart 2020).
13. <https://dariknews.bg/novini/bylgariia/vseki-treti-bylgarin-e-ezhedneven-pushach-2009827> (accessed 20 Mart 2020).
14. Milanova, P., Lifestyle and health status of adolescents. Dissertation, S., 2012.
15. Foyerline, D., Alcoholism: warning signals, prevention and treatment. Lik. S. 2000.
16. Lazarova, P., Georgieva, L., Marinova, Y., Attitudes of adolescents to drug use. *Sport & Science*, 3/2007.
17. Protsenko, E., Drugs and drug addiction. Integral. S. 2000.
18. Merdjanov, Ch., A compromising championship. University Publishing House "St. Kliment Ohridski". S. 1995.
19. <https://www.puls.bg/zdrav-um-c-31/koi-sa-nai-razprostranenie-zavisimosti-v-dneshno-vreme-n-17286> (accessed 20 Mart 2020).
20. <https://www.puls.bg/zdrav-um-c-31/koi-sa-nai-razprostranenie-zavisimosti-v-dneshno-vreme-2-n-17287> (accessed 20 Mart 2020).