



## Youth and health survey

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Young people aged from 15 to 19

The survey part took place in May in local high school where 200 students answered twenty-two questions linked to youth and health topic. After getting the results of the survey a debate was organised among 15 students to talk about the results and measure which can bring healthier life to our youth.

They were asked at first to define whether they think young people live a healthy life. 8.5 % said they think young people are living healthy life but 91.5 % disagreed. When asked at the end if they would change their habits in order to live a healthier life a third of them (32%) said that – although they think they don't live a healthy life – they wouldn't change their habits. When asked why their answer was: "You only live once, and once you are young". One problem was raised during the debate: many of the answers weren't sincere when answering the questionnaire and real results are even more shocking and more than 32 % wouldn't be ready to change their way of life.

To the question what do they think influence in a bad way their life and health they said that although drugs are something most destructive to our health, usage of drugs among young people in our community is really low and the main problems reside in consuming great amounts of alcohol, smoking, bad nutrition, not having enough rest and physical inactivity.

When it comes to smoking, 28 % defined themselves as smokers and most of them were under 18 which prove that the law against selling the cigarettes to minors is not respected. 88.5 % are aware of how bad cigarettes are for their health but others, among which most of them were consumers, do not want to admit this fact. Also 65 % of youngsters said they are bothered by the smoke of the cigarettes people around them smoke – as in Serbia we do not have separate rooms at local cafes for smokers and non-smokers, not to talk about the clubs where situation is even worse cause they are overloaded and do not have ventilation.

Alcohol is something these young people recognised as the most destructive thing which affects their health. Over 80 % of these young people said they are alcohol consumers. Drinking great loads of alcohol in order to have fun is something that captured *zeitgeist*. Alcohol is easy to get and mostly cheap. It is also proved that the most of young people budget is spent on buying alcohol at the week-ends.

The other two things that badly affect our health are bad nutrition and physical inactivity. Most of the young people decided to change mother's kitchen with fast food (junk food), mostly because nothing else can be found in our school surrounding and in late hours they are coming back from their going outs. But the other

cause for this bad nutrition is little free time our parents have. They are working long-hours coming home exhausted, desperate for some rest so it's easier for them to put a euro (around 100 dinars) into child's hand and say: "Go get some pizza or a sandwich". Between the meals young people also eat lots of chocolate and snacks, do not have regular meals and eat in late hours and that all affects their health in a bad way causing obesity and other disarrangements in nutrition. They do not eat enough vegetables and fruits and suffer of a lack of vitamins which makes their immunity system vulnerable and they often get sick. Also 25 % of participants in this survey admitted they starved in order to loose weight. 42 % of these youngsters are physically inactive. They are uninterested in playing sports, spend a lot of time in front of their TVs and computers and sleep during the day.

One more problem is lack of sleep. The results of the survey showed, and it's a fact I can agree about from personal experience, that 57 % of these young people go to bed between 11pm and 01am during school days but after 2 or even after 3 o'clock pass midnight at the week-ends. This seriously harms their immunity system, leaves them tired during the day, unable to concentrate at school, and leaving them no energy to be physically active. Also the medical fact is that the hormone of growth is mostly released into our body between the time periods of 10 to 02 o'clock in the evening during the sleep. Not respecting this law of nature young people grow shorter with each generation which is a real case in most parts of Serbia.

66 % of them said that they are educated in sexual health subject and sexually transmitted diseases which they kind of proved answering a few questions linked to this subject. But knowing in theory and taking care of your sexual life in real world is something different and very often young people make mistakes when drunk or careless. Concerning that, huge campaigns are ran in Serbia and a lot of organisations work on educating young people. Among those who answered this survey, 48 % have already had sex and age line of young people becoming sexually active starts from 15 or even 14 for girls and from 16 for boys.

At the very end we discussed measures which can be taken to ensure young people are living healthier life. Firstly they agreed that there should be more strict controls of selling cigarettes and alcohol to minors. Secondly, they voted for variety in nutrition, and to achieve that goal, they decided to run a campaign in school next year and make sure local fast food restaurants have different kinds of food to offer, different but also healthier. In third place they decided they need more sleep, and need to stop changing days for nights. In forth place they mentioned healthier environment and after that improved conditions for playing sports, more terrains and a city swimming-pool. Also they said that there is no connection between young people and health institutions, and that there is a big mistrust when it comes to relations doctor-patient because this is such a small community when everyone tries to pick into his neighbour's plate. So in order to take care of young people health we need to establish that trust.

Debate lasted one hour and a half and participants agreed that it was a very interesting subject and showed their regrets because such a little number of people showed interest for this debate and decided not to show up. They also agreed that more debates should be organised in order to answer many problems young people are facing in our community.