THE STUDY OF LIFESTYLE AND HEALTH STATUS IN THE POPULATION OF SOME MOLDAVIAN VILLAGES

IOSIF BALINT[1], MÁRTON DÉNES[2], ZOLTÁN ÁBRÁM[3]

[1,2,3]University of Medicine and Pharmacy Tîrgu-Mureş

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Abstract: The aim of our study is to become familiar with the habits and living conditions of the population of Bacău county and to investigate their health status. We conducted a survey based on a questionnaire in some Moldavian villages; the following parameters were examined: body mass index, blood pressure, blood sugar level, eating habits, physical activity, cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption, sleep parameters and measure of optimism. Applying the point system based on the answers we reached a conclusion on the health conditions of the surveyed population. The scores show that more than two-thirds of the population have proper health conditions. The total scores show that every fifth person is in an outstanding health status.

INTRODUCTION

Very important and controversial social changes occurred in Central and Eastern European countries after the transition period. As experienced in recent years, all the countries of the region, to some extent, have witnessed the deterioration of health indicators of the worsening health of the population, compared to the EU countries of the high level of backlog in the field of health care.(1)

In Romania, over the past few decades, extensive studies have investigated the public way of life, physical, mental, social background, health status, risk factors and protective factors for health analysis. In addition, data on lifestyle and health status collected during the 2007-2009 health surveys could not be processed and made public. According to the official position of the Health Ministry, data processing will not be done because the evaluation involves a high possibility of error.(2,3)

Little is known about the way of life of the rural population, their eating habits, or health status.(4) Taking into account the fact that in recent years the Department of Public Health of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Tîrgu Mureş has been conducting surveys among the population regarding lifestyle and health status, activities to monitor health education and promote health maintenance, it is a natural consequence to extend the research activities of the Department to health care and health surveying of the population of some villages in Bacău county. The primary objective of health promotion presentations was to deliver information to the general public regarding health, while apart from the health education work carried out in the villages – as far as it was possible – the aim was to measure and inspect, as well as to conduct a survey which examined life and health status, eating habits of the inhabitants. (5)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Three journeys to Bacău county villages were organized in order to examine the lifestyles and health status of the population. After the health education sessions appropriately tailored to the needs of the audience, various tests were performed (blood pressure, blood sugar, body weight index measurement, visual examination and dental examination – the latter sessions for children only), along with counselling, and personal conversations regarding lifestyle and health status.

We present the results of the survey on adult population in nine villages. Our sample is not representative, because only the participants to the health education lectures were surveyed, but the collected data provide useful information on the lifestyle and health status of the population. Two types of surveys were used: one to score the analysis of health and tests, the other to examine dietary habits. The health status questionnaire collected data on: body mass index, blood pressure, blood sugar, dietary habits, physical activity, cigarette and alcohol consumption, sleep parameters, degree of optimism. We analyzed the various parameters on the basis of the answers, and, using a scale system, we analyzed the health status of the studied population. The nutritional self-assessment test investigated twenty food groups, as well as the frequency of non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverage consumption.

RESULTS

The health examination survey involved 230 adults and 302 children. We only present information of adults, of whom 166 were females and 64 males, 43.9% aged 41-60. The above distribution of the population expresses the interest in health education lectures. In two-thirds of the respondents (66.5%), higher than normal body mass index (BMI) was detected, having rather overweight results (36.9%). We can speak about obesity if body mass index is above 30. In our group, every fourth person (29.5%) can be said to be obese. The percentage of the respondents with normal BMI is similar (29.1%).

Based on the International Classification of blood pressure, the blood pressure values recorded in the group can be classified as follows: 49.5% mild to moderate hypertension, while severe hypertension was diagnosed in 3.8%. However, in 0.4% of cases isolated systolic or diastolic hypertension was recorded, cases in which only one of the blood pressure values exceeded the limit. Optimum, normal, and normal to high blood pressure values were recorded in 46.1% of the investigated population (figure no. 1).

**Figure no. 1. Blood pressure measurements in the examined population**
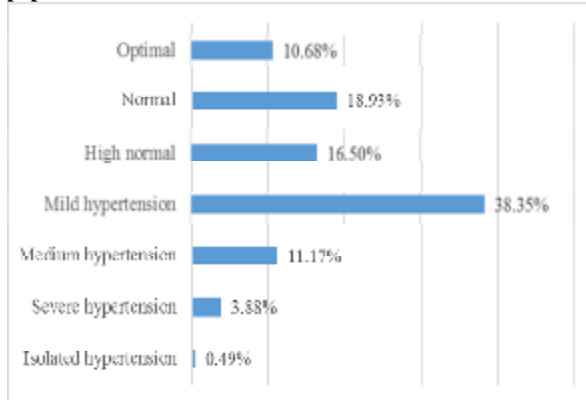
As far as eating habits are concerned, 55.2% of the examined population generally eats breakfast every day. Daily snacking between meals typical occurs in only a small percentage (15.6%). Physical activity, daily exercise is present in the majority of the studied population (77.8%), regarding the circumstances of village life. A lack of exercise is more typical of young people.

Frequent alcohol consumption: 71.3% of the respondents consume large amounts of alcohol either daily or weekly. No characteristic differences depending on gender were noted. Small quantities are usually typical for young women. Based on the respondents' statements, almost one in five people (18.7%) consume several alcoholic beverages daily.

Despite the elevated levels of alcohol consumption, smoking occurred to a lesser extent in the surveyed villages, while, according to the respondents' statements, 69.1% never smoked cigarettes, only 6.1% of the population smoked more than 10 cigarettes a day. Passive smoking can occur in a small percentage (17%) (figure no. 2).

Figure no. 2. Periodicity of smoking
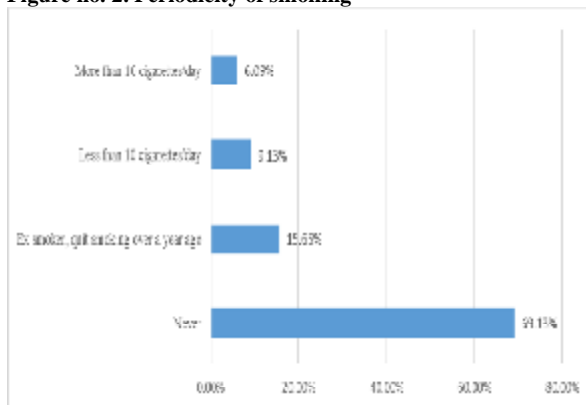
About 51.7% of the population characteristically sleeps 7-8 hours a day, while one in six people rarely or never sleeps this much. The majority of respondents are less optimistic, only 25.6% of the respondents consider themselves always optimistic, while 32.6% declare themselves optimistic only occasionally.

Based on the scores of the test, 66.1% of the population can be called healthy (50-75 points of 100). The score exceeds 75 points in every fourth person (25.6%), which indicates excellent health. Inadequate or alarming health status was recorded in 6.5% and 1.7%, respectively (below 50 or 25 points) (figure no. 3).

Figure no. 3. Health status after the obtained score
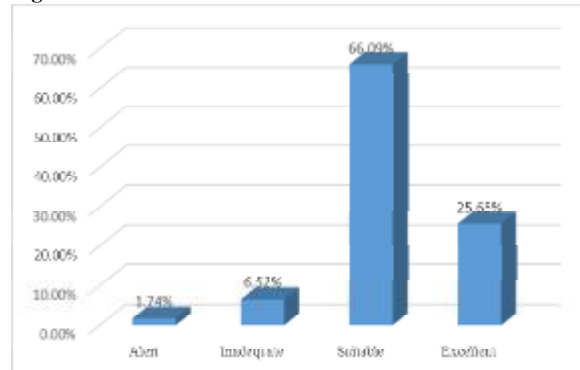
The dietary habits survey included consumption of 20 types of foods and it also examined their frequency. Nowadays, the great majority of the population (90.6%) consumes bread at least once daily, but the use of polenta is also high (38.3%). Further significant differences were observed between the children and the elderly regarding eating habits (p<0.01). The other most common types of food consumed at least once a day are: fruit (69.3%), vegetables (56.6%), milk (46.8%), sweets (47.3%), eggs (42.0%), boiled potatoes (27.5%), onion-garlic (33.4%), meat (38.5%), and cheese (30.5%).

Regarding drinking habits, we examined the frequency of alcoholic beverage consumption separately. While two out of three people (63.1%) consume tap water per day, only one in four drinks mineral water. The frequency of drinking coffee (24.3% minimum daily) is also lower than in other population samples.

Of the alcoholic beverages the most popular is wine which is consumed on a weekly basis by at least half of the surveyed population. This is followed by beer, consumed by one in three individuals once or more times a week. The extent of strong drink consumption is lesser, but the regular users become alcoholic patients.

DISCUSSIONS

Romania has been a member state of the European Union for years, but international reports and health data from national statistics determine relative backwardness as opposed to the European Union average. This can be attributed to unhealthy lifestyles, health education, and neglect of prevention.(6,7)

The most important lifestyle factors that influence the health of the Romanian population are typical diet in fat, animal origin cholesterol, sugar, salt, and spice-rich cuisine, as well as insufficient intake of vegetable fiber, low fruit and vegetable consumption. The eating habits change from generation to generation in accordance with the challenges of the era, while malnutrition leads to frequent cardiovascular disease, gastrointestinal disorders, diabetes, tooth decay, osteoporosis, obesity. Taking into account other lifestyle factors, hypertensive disease has become very frequent while cancer, depression, accidents, cirrhosis, and other diseases show a growing trend in the population.(8,9)

The use of stimulants (tobacco, alcohol) is also a risk factor for many diseases.(10,11) Of the alcoholic beverage indicators, the consumption of strong drink on one occasion is the most important risk factor, which is in direct proportion to the amount of low educational level. However, the majority of the respondents do not do sports, they exercise infrequently, while leisure activities mainly include sedentary ones. There is an increasing tendency of stressful, busy lifestyle, which is reflected in the well-being of the population.(12,13)

Based on the above lifestyle, it is particularly

important to educate and inform the different groups of population regarding healthy living.(5,14)

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CONCLUSIONS

Based on the distribution of the sample we can note that women showed greater interest in health promotion sessions.

Every fourth person can be regarded as overweight, while every fourth or fifth person has severe to moderate weight, and suffers from hypertensive disease which should be necessarily treated.

More than half of the population surveyed regularly eats breakfast, three-quarters perform physical activity on a daily basis.

The change in eating habits can be traced from generation to generation.

Smoking is characterized by below-average ratio, while increased consumption of alcohol can be noted, especially wine. Pessimism is relatively frequent, which may be related to difficult living conditions.

Although the sum of lifestyle factors in the studied population is adequate in more than two-thirds, moreover, every fifth person enjoys excellent health, every ninth person should definitely improve their lifestyle because of the cumulative risk factors.

Periodic filtration (secondary prevention), as well as extending health education, health promotion activities (primary prevention) create a chance for locals to improve their quality of life, to overcome the gap caused by poverty and inequalities.

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