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Physical Activity as a Challenge for Education and the Promotion of Women’s Health

Physical activity as an element of the modern woman’s lifestyle

Amid progressing globalization process and development of innovative technologies, the changes that took place in the world in the last decades of the 20th century brought about new possibilities along with challenges for the modern individual, simultaneously forcing a new lifestyle upon them. Widespread consumerism, in turn, determines high material aspirations, the participation in culture and the models of pasttime and leisure that are associated with it. As a result, being in good health is a means to achieving a better quality of life.

The manifold ways in which lifestyle affects health have been repeatedly observed and described. According to modern concepts within this scope, a person’s health is determined by numerous factors and one makes autonomous decisions regarding it. The interest in healthy lifestyle has been on the increase since the second half of the 20th century, also called the period of the second public health revolution or the “lifestyle age.” From the mid-1980s onwards, the notion of lifestyle systematically appears in academic publications and in documents of the World Health Organization (WHO), as an expression of medical science searching for methods of improving the society’s health. Therefore, the popularization of healthy lifestyle in order to increase the society’s health became a priority. Both WHO and the European Union have ordered a monitoring of the health-promoting behaviours determining the healthy lifestyle.

The notion of lifestyle originated in sociology and over the years has gained a status of a crucial health-determining variable. It is characterized by the individual, environmental, and cultural diversity; it is a factor that differentiates social classes, when taking into account not only the economic criteria, but also the amount of free time and the methods of spending it, as well as cultural interests and degree of participation in cultural events, the fulfilment of goals and life purposes.¹

Physical activity, closely related to other elements of healthy lifestyle – eating, personal hygiene, coping with stress, abstaining from drinking alcohol and abusing drugs, optimistic outlook on life – became the basis thereof, positively influencing both physical health and general mental state. Performing physical exercise, as a natural biological need, is a part of human life in its entirety, determining physical development, the possibility of gainful employment, and one's relation with the natural environment.²

The field of physical education is the one that encompasses the complete set of values associated with health, fitness, resilience, and boosting immune system.³ Physical education is a system of non-communal activities and it always exists within a particular social culture, susceptible to historical changes, justified axiologically and appropriate to the ideological interpretation of life accepted by a given society. Physical education as society-based system belongs within the scope of social education.⁴ As an element and a prerequisite of healthy lifestyle, physical education is a crucial factor determining health, the quality of life and the human species' lifespan.⁵

By being a crucial factor in shaping person's wellbeing, developing good habits and other healthy behaviours, regular physical activity is a notion prompting multiple definitions and interpretations. It is

¹ E. Syrek: *Zdrowie i wychowanie a jakość życia. Perspektywy i humanistyczne orientacje Poznawcze*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2008, pp. 50–51.

² A. Jopkiewicz, P. Wróblewski: *Aktywność fizyczna a zdrowie*. W: *Auksologia a promocja zdrowia*. Red. A. Jopkiewicz. Kielce-Warszawa: Kieleckie Towarzystwo Naukowe–Almamer Wyższa Szkoła Ekonomiczna w Warszawie, 2010, p. 261.

³ W. Okoń: *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie „Żak”, 2004, p. 208.

⁴ A. Pawłucki: *Nauki o kulturze fizycznej*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo AWF, 2013, p. 162.

⁵ E. Rutkowska: *Aktywność fizyczna w pielęgnowaniu zdrowia*. W: *Promocja zdrowia w praktyce pielęgniarstwa i położnictwa*. T. 2. Red. A. Andruszkiewicz, M. Banaszkiwicz. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Lekarskie PZWL, 2010, pp. 303–304.

most often broadly defined as: all actions involving physical effort and exercise. It includes various forms of physical mobility encompassing physical exercise and sports understood as planned and repeated body movements aiming to improve fitness level as well as the efforts associated with everyday actions or professional activities.⁶

Currently, there is a growing tendency to treat physical activity as vital. The reasons behind it include both the rising awareness of health problems in the world, which in highly-developed countries include diseases of affluence, and the rise in the number of diseases caused by the increasing immobility?⁷

The needs concerning physical activity differ across the spectrum of individuals, determined by age and everyday burdens associated with a given career path or health condition.

Depending on the stage of ontogenetic development, exercise acts as a stimulus that shapes the biological functions of the human body and, relatively to a form of participation, enables the social and mental development. In the period of individual's physical progressing growth, spontaneous movement and games involving physical movement stimulate development. In adulthood, directed and supervised physical activities support one's adaptation to changeable and frequently specific work-environment requirements, compensating for the physical or mental overburdening triggered by professional activities, and simultaneously comprising the stimulus that introduces equilibrium into our daily routine in the age of information technology and heavy industry. When human body ages, physical training reduces the consequences of physiological involution changes, the decrease in fitness and body functioning.⁸

Sedentary behaviours are the opposite of physical activity; they are characterized by immobility or low movement intensity and include: watching television, using a computer, reading.⁹ Immobility, the so-called inactivity of movement is a phenomenon that intensified in the second half of the 20th century and relates to a disproportion between the increasing burdening of the nervous system and the decreasing

⁶ B. Woynarowska: *Zdrowe żywienie i aktywność fizyczna*. W: *Edukacja zdrowotna*. Red. B. Woynarowska. Warszawa: PWN, 2007, p. 314.

⁷ M. Zapała, B. Kowalczyk, B. Lubińska-Żądło: *Aktywność fizyczna a styl życia w wieku produkcyjnym*. „*Medycyna Ogólna i Nauki o Zdrowiu*” 2015, T. 21, nr 4, pp. 391-397.

⁸ E. Rutkowska: *Aktywność fizyczna w pielęgnowaniu zdrowia...*, p. 303.

⁹ B. Woynarowska: *Aktywność fizyczna*. W: *Biomedyczne podstawy kształcenia i wychowania*. Red. B. Woynarowska, A. Kowalewska, Z. Izdebski, K. Komosińska. Warszawa: PWN, 2010, p. 201.

burdening of the motor system. The World Health Organization considers hypokinesia a phenomenon of affluence and the main cause of death, especially in highly-developed countries.¹⁰ Social diseases are (mostly) explainable by the modern person's immobility.¹¹

Insufficient amount of physical activity as well along with the lower fitness level and worse physical functioning, chronic fatigue, bad mental state and neurotic disorders, make an individual susceptible to diseases of affluence.¹² The lack of regular physical exercise is the cause of cardiovascular diseases, some types of cancer, diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, hypertension, depression, spinal aches, and joint afflictions. Systematic physical exercise influences a person's wellbeing positively, in both therapeutic and preventive way, contributing to the lowering of blood pressure and the reduction of fat tissue, while the regulation of the carbohydrate and lipid metabolism decreases the risk of the diseases of affluence that tend to occur.¹³

According to the HBSC research carried out in Poland in 2014, in more than three-fourths of youth aged 11-15, health is under risk due to the lack of physical activity. Physical activity decreases with age in both boys and girls. Yet girls are more at risk of hypokinetic diseases, since their general physical activity is lower than boys'. In the last four years, a statistically crucial 4% increase of youth aged 11-15 meeting the international recommendations regarding the level of physical activity was observed, which forecasts a positive direction of changes in the level of physical activity.¹⁴

A collection of studies *Stan zdrowia ludności Polski w 2014 roku* (The health condition of Poles in 2014), published by Główny Urząd Statystyczny (the Central Statistical Office) shows that 47% of adult Poles perform everyday activities while standing or sitting and 40% of adults have jobs that involve sitting or moderate physical activity. One in ten Poles declares to have a job that is too physically strenuous. High level of physical strain was declared mainly by men and people with lower level of education. Among individuals in their twenties, every

¹⁰ M. Zapała, B. Kowalczyk, B. Lubińska-Żądło: *Aktywność fizyczna a styl życia...*, pp. 391-397.

¹¹ R. Przewęda: *Promocja zdrowia przez wychowanie fizyczne*. W: *Promocja zdrowia*. Red. J.B. Karński. Warszawa: Ignis, 1999, p. 201.

¹² A. Jopkiewicz, P. Wróblewski: *Aktywność fizyczna a zdrowie...*, p. 261.

¹³ A. Andruszkiewicz, M. Banaszkiewicz, B. Kiełbratowska: *Ocena stanu zdrowia dla potrzeb działań z zakresu promocji zdrowia*. W: *Promocja zdrowia w praktyce pielęgniarstwa i położnej*. T. 2..., pp. 317-318.

¹⁴ See http://www.imid.med.pl/images/dopobrania/Zdrowie_i_zachowania_zdrowotne_www.pdf [accessed: 14.02.2017].

third person declares going in for sports, among individuals in their thirties – every fourth person. The average exercise time amounts to 62 minutes a week among people in their twenties and 48 minutes a week among individuals in their thirties. The analysis of physical activity during free time has shown that women are less likely to undertake physical exercise or their exercise time is shorter than men's. The universality of taking up sports decreases dramatically with age. As much as 2.2 million of adult Poles have declared participation in resistance or strengthening exercises requiring specialist equipment. One in ten men and one in 18 women claim to attend gym. Doing away without physical exercises at all was declared mostly by women – 62% of all women and 55% of all men. Only one in seven women and one in five men can be described as being physically active.¹⁵ According to *Raport z badań TNS Polska: Aktywność sportowa Polaków* (A report of the research of TNS Polska: The sport activity of Poles), published in September 2015, almost one third of Poles practises sports regularly or engages in other forms of physical activities at least three times a week. However, the percentage of people who are not physically active is similar and amounts to 32%. Men and city inhabitants aged up to 25 practise sports considerably more often. As they age this level of activity gradually decreases only to rise again in the 60+ age group. The forms of activity most often taken up by Poles include: cycling – declared by 53% of those physically active, running – declared by 33% of active Poles, and swimming regularly – declared by 29%. At the same time, those are disciplines that are popular across all the studied age groups, regardless of the place of residence, gender, or education. Moreover, 20% of physically active women and 22% of physically active men goes to fitness clubs where women prefer group classes and men – individual trainings.¹⁶

Research methodology and results

The needs pertaining to being physically active are highly individual. According to the up-to-date research, the effects considered the most

¹⁵ Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z dnia 4 sierpnia 2016 r. w sprawie Narodowego Programu Zdrowia na lata 2016–2020. Dz.U. 2016, poz. 1492. <http://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/zdrowie/zdrowie/stan-zdrowia-ludnosci-polski-w-2014> [accessed: 14.02.2017].

¹⁶ *Porozmawiajmy o sporcie, czyli aktywność fizyczna Polaków i... jej brak.* <http://www.tnsglobal.pl/informacje/porozmawiajmy-o-sporcie-czyli-aktywnosc-fizyczna-polakow-i-jej-brak> [accessed: 14.02.2017].

beneficial to health are achieved by practising physical activities on most, if not all, days of the week. For example, a brisk 30-minute march each day, or on most days of the week, brings multiple benefits. Single exercises should last about 30 minutes, but even several very brief sessions, which amount to 30 minutes altogether, positively affect person's health (see <http://www.izz.waw.pl/pl/aktywno-fizyczna>). Practising sports when young, as well as positive experiences associated with it, shape the habits facilitating health preservation in later years.¹⁷

A survey questionnaire was conducted on a representative sample of 445 women, residents of the Silesian Voivodeship. The respondents were aged 18 to 45. The survey was conducted in the year 2014. Its main purpose was to verify whether the respondent women exercise regularly, what kinds of physical activities they prefer, and what are their motives for either practising or not practising physical exercises.

As much as 67.64% of the respondents declared remaining physically active. On the scale from 0 to 3, taking into account the type and frequency of particular forms of physical activity, the respondent women declared (decreasing order): gymnastic workout, other forms of activity, swimming, aerobics, running, stretching, nordic walking, volleyball, pilates, tennis, yoga, and basketball (Figure 1).

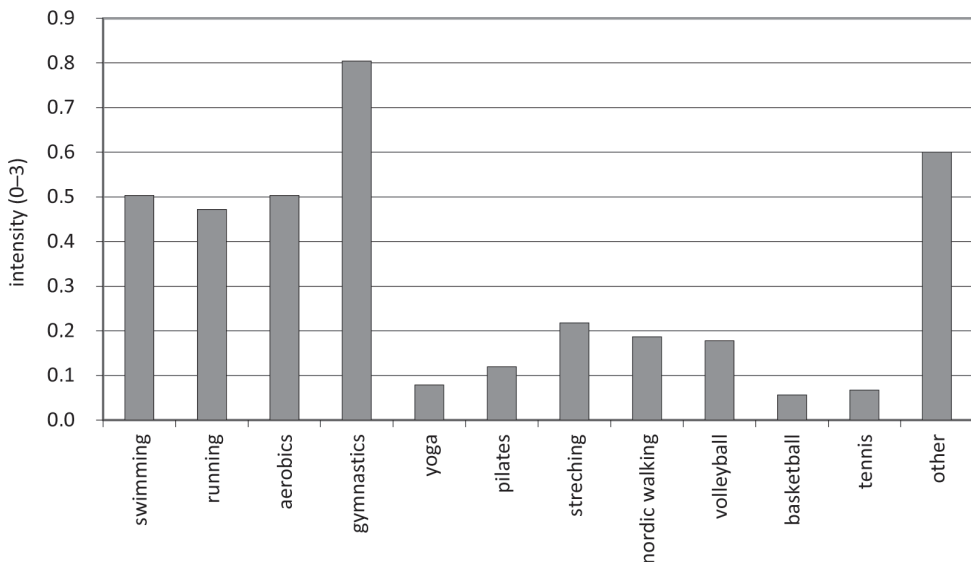


Fig. 1. The frequency of particular forms of physical activity among the female respondents
Source: the author's own elaboration.

¹⁷ See www.mz.gov.pl/zdrowie-i-profilaktyka/zdrowie-matki-i-dziecka/zdrowie-uczni/aktywnosc-fizyczna-i-sport [accessed: 8.03.2017].

From among 32.36% ($N = 144$) of women who declared their physical inactivity, the survey elicited the following reasons (with respective percentages): *the lack of time* – 64%, 14% of the “inactive” women claim that *there is no need*, and 2% of women give *feeling ashamed* as a reason for no physical activity, 1% of women *fears injuries*, 11% of respondents maintain that *they [have] noone to practise with*, and 8% declares *other reasons* (Figure 2).

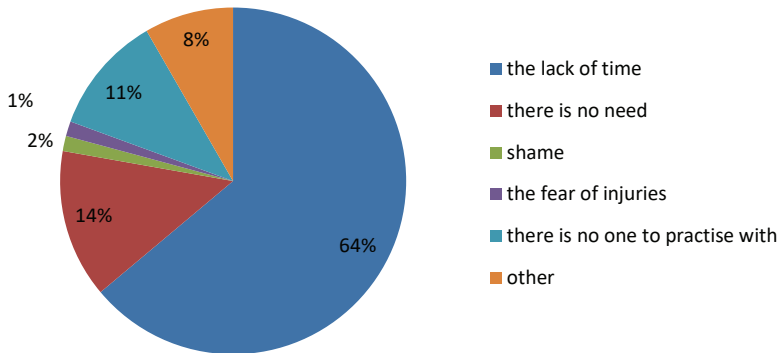


Fig. 2. Reasons for no physical activeness among the female respondents ($N = 144$)

Source: the author's own elaboration.

From among all the respondent women, 11.46% claim that physical activity helps them relieve stress.

As much as 49% of physically active respondents give *weight loss* as the motive for exercise, whereas 19% exercises in order to attain *better mental state*. *Being persuaded by friends (to take up exercises)* is given as a reason by 15% of respondents, 6% exercises due to *physician's orders* and 11% cites *other reasons* for physical trainings (Figure 3).

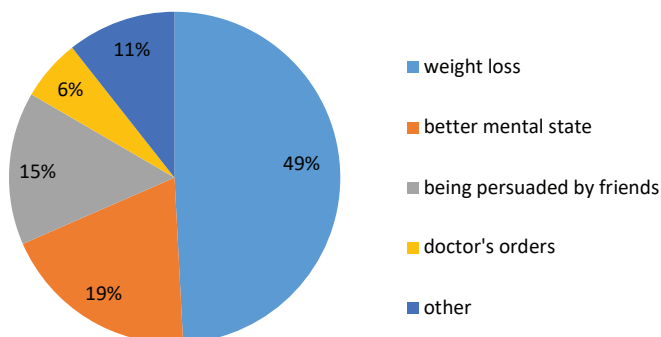


Fig. 3. The respondent women's motives for performing physical exercise ($N = 445$)

Source: the author's own elaboration.

The day-to-day lifestyles of women are determined mainly by their family situation, their career, or place of residence. Having to incur a heavy burden of both household chores and professional obligations, the help and support of the closest people determine the scheduling of free time, including the regular daily exercise.

Physical activity as a challenge for education and the promotion of women's health

Participating in the culture of physical education may, among others, take a form of workout, which constitutes an integral and key element of a healthy lifestyle. Without physical exercise any strategy of maintaining health or improving it is impossible. Systematic physical exercise brings numerous benefits to all aspects of health; the biological, psychological, and social. Therefore, it can be called a crucial factor in ensuring health, particularly developing healthy habits and behaviours, and additionally, is considered a valuable form of spending free time.

Both national and international institutions which promote healthy lifestyle, list the development and implementation of different forms of physical activity as one of their main purposes.

Global organizations such as: WHO – the World Health Organization, FIMS – the International Federation of Sports Medicine, NIH – the National Institute of Health in the United States, UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, alarmed by the effects of the increase in hypokinetic behaviours, call for the promotion of the health-improving physical activities as a modern strategy of public health. The new Public Health Act dated 11th of September 2015 legally defines the notion of public health by enumerating the actions that are its elements, including the works in the field of physical activity.¹⁸

In the National Health Programme for the years 2016–2020 (Polish: *Narodowy Program Zdrowia na lata 2016–2020*) the Operational Target B is: “The increase in the physical activity of the general population.” The achievement of this target will be a contributing factor in limiting the disease occurrence and premature deaths caused by cardiovascular diseases, different types of cancer, and metabolic disorders. The Polish Ministry of Sport and Tourism in cooperation with the Minister

¹⁸ Ustawa z dnia 11 września 2015 r. o zdrowiu publicznym. Dz.U. 2015, poz. 1916. <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU20150001916> [accessed: 8.03.2017].

of Health and the Minister of National Education were the subjects responsible for the implementation of the said operational target, and the local government units were the contractors. The tasks included: promoting the safety of pedestrians and cyclists, and simultaneously persuading individuals to take up these forms of movement, the increase of the affordability and physical accessibility of sport facilities, introducing the campaigns encouraging lifestyle changes, encouraging the attendance at school physical education (PE) classes by diversifying their forms, attempting to make the elderly more active, the improvement of the equipment of the infrastructure and increasing the accessibility and competencies of the organizers of events associated with physical exercise.¹⁹ The World Health Organization intensifies its campaigns serving to improve the society's health and quality of life. The investments in the promotion of health, primary prevention including ecology, healthy lifestyle, the environmental conditions favourable to health, the early monitoring of risk factors and the implementation of preventive measures are the most successful. The programmes promoting physical health emphasize that physical activity is one of the easiest and, at the same time, one of the most neglected forms of health care. The popularization programmes attempt to bring the activity of social groups, usually beyond the reach of the obligatory physical education, up to the desired level.²⁰

Shaping the appropriate health-promoting behaviours is the target of health education. Health education as a lifelong process concerns the entire context of human life. As an element of primary socialization, encompassing childhood and youth, and secondary socialization, in adulthood, it occurs naturally in all human settlements, including their homes, places of study, work, rest, and medical facilities.²¹ Parents play an indisputable role in their children's physical exercise practises. According to the subject literature, the healthy behaviours of children and youth are determined by the parents' levels of education. The parents' awareness of the function of exercising during childhood and youth, the models of behaviour favoured by the parents as well as a given child's age – all the aforesaid factors determine a family's lifestyle characterized by the integrating role of physical activities. The younger the child, the greater its bond with the parents. Parental

¹⁹ Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z dnia 4 sierpnia 2016 r. w sprawie Narodowego Programu Zdrowia na lata 2016–2020...

²⁰ E. Rutkowska: *Aktywność fizyczna w pielęgnowaniu zdrowia...*, pp. 305–306.

²¹ B. Woynarowska: *Zdrowe żywienie i aktywność fizyczna...*, p. 2015.

authority decreases considerably with time, while the peer authority regarding life choices, including those lifestyle-related, grows.²²

Physical education at school remains of crucial importance on both the social and individual level. The PE class directly influences the physical and mental state of the younger generation. It improves the society's health and builds the habits of exercising that contain benefit of health improvement to individuals from all the age groups.

One of the education reform's assumptions is that school shall prepare a student not only for the next stage of education, but also for a wise and responsible life, which is proven by health education being included into the latest Core Curriculum (Polish: *Podstawy programowe kształcenia ogólnego*) for primary and secondary schools. A given teacher plays a key role in health education, as he or she is not only an educator, but also a designer of models of healthy behaviours for both children and their parents. The teacher fulfils the purposes and assumptions of health education through a rational approach thereto, the forming of sanitary habits and introducing healthy patterns of nutrition.²³

The most important source of information regarding multiple aspects of life, including health-related behaviours, are the mass media. The National Health Programme (Polish *Narodowy Program Zdrowia*) and the Broadcasting Act (*Ustawa o radiofonii i telewizji*) also mention the educational role of mass media. Media adjust their offer to the expectations of the society. However, that requires the identification of appropriate social groups and targeting at them the mass medium of their preference. Such action will allow a greater chance of succeeding and the effectiveness of influencing the society's health-related choices.²⁴

The activities in the field of health promotion and education should include the development of individual skills favourable to the optimal development of man; those include the systematic and rational physical effort and healthy workout undertaken to obtain physical and mental results leading to the prevention of the decrease in adaptation capabilities of the human body. Therefore, these activities constitute a crucial element of the healthy lifestyle.

²² M. Skonieczka: *Rodzinne uwarunkowania aktywności fizycznej w przeglądzie piśmiennictwa*. „Rocznik Naukowy AWFIS w Gdańsku” 2011, T. 21, p. 99.

²³ C. Lewicki: *Edukacja zdrowotna – systemowa analiza zagadnień*. Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2006, pp. 173–174.

²⁴ M. Syrkiewicz-Światała, T. Holeccki, E. Wojtynek: *Znaczenie mass mediów w promocji zdrowia*. „Medycyna Ogólna i Nauki o Zdrowiu” 2014, T. 20, nr 2, pp. 171–176.

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Alina Dworak

Physical Activity as a Challenge for Education and the Promotion of Women's Health

Summary: A crucial element of the health culture is physical education. Physical training is one of the conditions of healthy lifestyle and achieving a better quality of life. Without the economic pressure or other vital necessity, an individual is prone to save his or her energy. As a result, sedentary lifestyle proliferates with all its consequences, including those health-related. Inactivity with predominating sedentary behaviours became a part of the society's lifestyle.

The article characterises types of physical activities undertaken by women residing in the Silesian Voivodeship, simultaneously indicating the necessity of educational and promotional actions regarding this sphere of life.

Key words: physical activity, lifestyle, woman, health promotion, health education

Alina Dworak

Körperliche Aktivität als eine Herausforderung für Bildung und Popularisierung der Frauengesundheit

Zusammenfassung: Ein wichtiges Element der Gesundheitskultur stellt die Körperkultur dar. Körperlicher Training ist einer von den ein gesundes Lebensstil und bessere Lebensqualität bestimmenden Faktoren. Der aus ökonomischen Gründen oder aus Lebensnotwendigkeit nicht dazu gezwungene Mensch ist bereit, seine körperlichen Kräfte zu schonen. Im Resultat wird

die sitzende Lebensweise samt deren allen, darunter auch gesundheitlichen Konsequenzen verbreitet. Die Passivität und der Bewegungsmangel mit dominanter sesshafter Lebensweise wurden zu normalen Elementen des gesellschaftlichen Lebens. Im vorliegenden Beitrag werden verschiedene Formen der körperlichen Aktivität von den in der schlesischen Woiwodschaft lebenden Frauen geschildert. Die Verfasserin weist dabei hin auf die Notwendigkeit, die körperliche Aktivität zu verbreiten und zu popularisieren.

Schlüsselwörter: körperliche Aktivität, Lebensstil, Frau, Gesundheitspopularisierung, Gesundheitsbildung