

ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' LIFESTYLE THE UNIVERSITY OF BARI ALDO MORO¹

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1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organization definition (1946), “health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being” influenced by many factors concerning the wide concept of lifestyle. This expression is related to a way of living modelled on a set of identifiable behaviours, as a result of the human mutual action and his/her proper characteristics in response to socio-economic and environmental conditions which inevitably influence his/her actions (WHO, 1998, p. 16). Indeed, it is worth considering an international consensus, based on epidemiological evidence, according to which lifestyle has a sharp impact on the possibility to avoid the development of diseases, to check their evolution or, conversely, to cause their outbreak. Consider, for instance, non-communicable diseases, one of the leading cause of death in the world. As a matter of fact, a high rate of such deaths could be prevented by reducing the related major behavioural risk factors, that is to say physical inactivity, unhealthy dietary behaviours, tobacco smoking habits and the harmful consumption of alcohol (WHO, 2013). Moreover, the impact of a similar trend is crucial for the health condition of the community. To confirm this, a regular physical activity reduces, among others, the risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and depression (WHO, 2010). Along with physical activity, nutrition plays a fundamental role in the prevention of a lot of illnesses such as osteoporosis and obesity (Swinburn et al., 2004). Tobacco smoking, counting approximately six million deaths across the world per year, represents the single greatest preventable cause of death (WHO, 2015). The consumption of alcoholic beverages, in harmful amounts or manner, increases the risk of developing many diseases like alcoholic addiction, liver cirrhosis and cancer, apart from being co-responsible of many incidental damages, likewise in

¹ This article can be considered as the result of the collaboration between the two Authors. In particular, paragraphs 2, 3 are to be attributed to Giovanna Da Molin; paragraphs 4, 5 are to be attributed to Elita Anna Sabella; paragraphs 1, 6 are to be attributed to both Authors.

the case of risk-taking sexual behaviour, harassments, injuries and road accidents (WHO, 2014).

However, being modifiable risk factors, this trend may change through an appropriate health education, which, from a very early age, can trigger the individual awareness of lifestyle effects. Indeed, the preadolescent and adolescent period represents a crucial step for the individual development, where some unhealthy conducts can be assumed (Cavallo et al. Eds, 2015), conditioning the current and future health. Afterwards, such conducts can get established, increase or lessen, in the subsequent age, where choices related to future perspectives are taken. In fact, not only among teenagers, but even among young people (ISTAT, 2015, 2016; PASSI, 2016), including university students (Di Pietro et al., 2015; Poscia et al., 2015; Teleman et al., 2015a, b), a remarkable incidence of unhealthy lifestyles, from sedentary living to tobacco smoking habits, is recorded.

Hence, the promotion of a healthy lifestyle should develop both with the intent of reducing the probability of unhealthy behaviours and in order to modify those attitudes they have been already acquired. Also non-governmental actors, such as the civil society, research centres, communities and associations may be in charge of it. University, in particular, can execute this task: since it represents a pole of attraction for a multitude of young people, it gets to know them better, by using the research instruments, implementing the skills of internal and external experts and taking effective actions of information and communication.

2. Objective and method

The current research has been promoted and managed by the Standing Committee “Generational Observatory” of the University of Bari Aldo Moro. The Committee is primarily aimed at detecting the needs and the expectations of young people in order to translate them into active policies on their behalf. With this intent, the periodic monitoring of students at the University of Bari is inserted among the multiple areas of intervention in which the Observatory is actively involved. In so doing, the submission of some questionnaires to the students, designed to know their living and studying conditions, has been the research instrument it used. This paper illustrates the results of the first survey led by the Observatory. It aims at outlining the students’ lifestyle and its risk factors in order to undertake some specific prevention actions and their related information, to bring a new culture of health and wellbeing to the light. This study involved all university students between the age of 18 and 34, enrolled, within November 2014 and January 2015, in the first of the three-year Bachelor Degree Courses, One-Cycle Master Degree Courses and Second-level Master Degree Courses, activated

during the academic year 2014/2015 at the University of Bari. The instrument for the data collection was a self-administered questionnaire divided into sections aimed at outlining several aspects related to the university students' lifestyle, e.g., physical activity, eating behaviours, tobacco smoking habits and the consumption of alcohol². Closed ended and multiple choice questions were used to address the above mentioned dimensions. A web survey (Corbetta, 2014) was used through the software ESSE3³. Subsequently, data were performed using SPSS software. Univariate analyses, i.e., frequency distributions, and bivariate analyses, i.e., contingency tables⁴ were computed.

A number of 10,550 university students has been involved in the research, among which 4,118 are males (39.0%) and 6,432 females (61.0%). Overall, the mean age of the students is 20.5 years. In detail, 57.5% of respondents are under 20 years old, 34.2% are between 20 and 24, while 8.3% are between 25 and 34 years old. What is more, 66.9% of the university students are enrolled in a three-years Bachelor Degree Course, 19.2% in a One-cycle Master Degree programme while 13.9% in a Second-level Master Degree Course. As far as the education field is concerned, 33.7% chose a legal-economic path, 26.4% opted for Humanities, the Scientific offer gained ground for 25.1% of the students and finally 14.8% was targeted to medical studies.

3. Physical activity

Physical activity is one of the most important health determinants at all life stages. It includes not only the practice of sport but also each body movement by skeletal muscles which requires a waste of energy. Manual works and normal everyday movements are included, too (WHO, 2010, p. 53). As far as sport is concerned, it is the typical leisure activity for young people. It involves around two third of the students, with a significant gender gap in favour of the male group, this equates to around 20%. Specifically, about a quarter of all students practice sport occasionally while a little over one in three are keen on it regularly twice or three times a week or at a competitive level. With advancing age, a steady increase of athletes is registered. In detail, the occasional sport activity is typical of young people between the age of 25 and 34 and regular physical exercise involves similar

² The only questions referring to tobacco smoking habits and alcoholic consumption were not compulsory.

³ ESSE3 (Students Secretarial Services) is the management software for the university secretaries. The students were compelled to fill in the format at the time of their first log in the university website, namely their personal page on ESSE3, used for online enrollment.

⁴ Chi-square test was used. P values <0.05 were considered statistically significant.

figures for people between the age of 20 and 24 and between the age of 25 and 34, nearly 40% (table 1). Cardio-fitness and bodybuilding are the most popular sport activities among the athletes from the University of Bari in order to keep them fit and healthy. Running is allocated at second position, maybe because it is free from any time and cost constraints. All the above mentioned sports, as well as gymnastic and ballet, involve mostly women. Conversely, football, as well as combat sports, martial arts and basketball, involves mostly men. Additional sports are skating, horse-riding, trekking, sailing, canoeing, track and field, table tennis and refereeing (table 2).

Table 1 – *Do you practice any sport? Distribution by sex and age class. (percentage values)*

	Sex*		Age class**			Total %
	Male %	Female %	18-19 %	20-24 %	25-34 %	
Yes, occasionally	29.3	24.0	24.8	26.8	32.1	26.1
Yes, 2-3 times a week	37.9	27.5	29.8	33.5	35.9	31.5
Yes, at a competitive level	10.1	4.0	7.1	5.7	4.1	6.4
Not	22.7	44.5	38.3	34.0	27.9	36.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

N=10,550

**p<0.001*

***p<0.001*

Table 2 – *Which sport do you practice? Distribution by sex. (percentage values)*

	Sex		Total %
	Male %	Female %	
Cardio-fitness and bodybuilding	24.5	31.2	28.0
Running	23.3	28.3	26.0
Football	50.9	2.1	25.1
Gymnastic	11.2	23.5	17.7
Swimming	11.4	12.5	12.0
Ballet	2.8	16.6	10.1
Volleyball	6.8	8.6	7.8
Combat sports and martial arts	10.1	4.0	6.9
Cycling	6.4	4.8	5.6
Other sport	5.7	3.1	4.3
Basketball	6.5	0.8	3.5
Tennis	4.2	2.7	3.4

N=6,752

Nevertheless, even without doing any sport, a man aged 18-64 years can keep himself/herself healthy by practicing, at least, 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity (WHO, 2010). With regard to this, 7.9% of the

students dedicate, at least, 30 minutes a day to physical movement, even without practicing any sport⁵. Lastly, the figure of students practicing neither sport nor other physical activities is 28.1%. Above all, the predominance of the so-called “inactives” is particularly strong for women, more than twice the amount of men. Beside the sex, the behaviours vary on grounds of age, revealing less attention for physical exercise by under 20s (table 3).

Table 3 – *Students practicing sport, other physical activities and non-practicing students. Distribution by sex and age class. (percentage values)*

	Sex*		Age class**			Total %
	Male %	Female %	18-19 %	20-24 %	25-34 %	
Students practicing sport	77.3	55.5	61.6	66.0	72.1	64.0
Students practicing other physical activities	5.8	9.3	8.7	7.4	5.0	7.9
Students practicing neither sport nor other physical activities	16.9	35.2	29.7	26.6	22.9	28.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

N=10,550

**p<0.001*

***p<0.001*

4. Eating habits

An appropriate food arrangement during the day contributes to determine and maintain a correct nutritional status. We should be capable of meeting our food requirements in different moments of the day. It would be correct to distribute the caloric intake in the following way: 20% at breakfast, 5% at mid-morning, 40% at lunch, 5% at mid-afternoon and 30% at dinner.

Thus, breakfast is the first fundamental step to the daily diet for a fair lifestyle. The majority of the university students use to have breakfast every morning (80.4%), even though is not negligible the percentage of people skipping the first meal of the day (19.6%), especially evident among males (21.3%) more than females (18.5%), as the chi-square test highlights ($p<0.001$). Their preferred breakfast is the Italian one: milk is the main food of the diet, even in its vegetal version, followed by coffee and biscuits. On the other hand the good habit of consuming fruit or dry fruit in the morning is still uncommon. Few are those who appreciate ham, eggs and cheese-based savory breakfast (table 4).

⁵ Those students declaring not to practice sport, answered to the following question: *Do you spend at least 30 minutes per day for your physical activity?*

Table 4 – *What do you usually eat for breakfast? (percentage values)*

	%
Milk	63.0
Coffee	57.9
Biscuits	55.9
Cereals	27.6
Croissants	23.5
Sweet snack	16.8
Fruit juice	15.9
Chocolate cream	14.2
Jam	13.2
Yogurt	11.8
Tea	10.1
Fruit	9.7
Eggs	1.9
Ham	1.8
Other	1.7
Bread, rusks	0.9
Cheese	0.9
Sparkling drinks	0.5

N=8,483

Following with the overview emerged from the results, it is worth considering that only one in ten students don't use to take even one break between the main meals (10.0%). More specifically, 12.8% of them eat a break at mid-morning, 45.9% say to prefer an afternoon break and 31.3% refer to eat both.

Furthermore, the analysis enquires about the students' habits at lunch – still considered the main meal for Italians (ISTAT, 2015) – and at dinner. Both meals are indispensable for the majority of the students. The lunch-main course is the first dish; as regards dinner, instead, the second dish is what they prefer. At dinner, compared with lunch, the consumption of side dish and bread increases while the fruit and desserts one diminishes (table 5).

Table 5 – *What does your lunch/dinner usually consist of? (percentage values)*

	Lunch %	Dinner %
First dish	92.0	11.4
Second dish	69.6	82.4
Side dish	31.9	53.7
Bread	37.5	43.0
Fruit	59.2	44.2
Desserts	16.8	9.5
I skip the meal	0.4	0.9

N=10,550

A reconstruction of a sample lunch/dinner menu has been obtained from the combination of the above examined elements. Particularly, lunch represents the moment in which students use to grant themselves both the first and the second dish. A very little group, on the contrary, does the same at dinner. Dinner, indeed, is most related with the consumption of a second dish. The unhealthy habit of skipping the two main courses is more widespread at dinner than lunch as further the trend of people only eating bread, fruit or desserts shows (table 6).

Table 6 – *Lunch/dinner composition. (percentage values)*

	Lunch *	Dinner**
	%	%
Both first and second dish	63.7	7.4
Only first dish	28.7	4.1
Only second dish	6.2	75.8
Side dish and/or bread and/or fruit and/or desserts	1.4	12.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Both the exclusive consumption of the mentioned dishes (first and second) and the consumption of the same with side dish and/or fruit and/or bread and/or desserts have been considered.

*N=10,510

**N=10,450

Needless to say that the water intake, aimed at the water balance equilibrium, is fundamental to keep a good state of health. It is necessary to drink the proper amount of water, not less than 1.5/2 litres per day (INRAN, 2003). The respondents are divided on almost equal terms into two groups: those showing a healthy conduct, by drinking at least 1.5 litres of water a day and those who drink a maximum of 1 litre. This latter attitude is registered through women, more than men (table 7).

Table 7 – *On average, how much water do you drink every day? Distribution by sex. (percentage values)*

	Sex*		Total %
	Male %	Female %	
Less than half a litre	1.4	4.1	3.1
Half a litre	6.5	14.6	11.4
1 litre	24.2	33.7	30.0
1,5 litre	31.6	27.5	29.1
2 litres	24.0	14.9	18.5
More than 2 litres	12.3	5.2	7.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

N=10,550

*p<0.001

5. Tobacco smoking habits and alcohol consumption

Among the harmful behaviours on human health, tobacco smoking habits and alcohol consumption are included. As regards the first aspect, 24.3% of the students declare to smoke, in respect of a considerable prevalence of non-smokers and former smokers. Tobacco smoking habits are mostly widespread among men rather than women, with a gender gap in favour of the formers, around 7%. Different behaviours, also in relation to age, are registered: the number of smokers is larger in older age classes while the largest percentage of those who never smoked stands among under 20s (table 8). Focusing on the field of study, it can be noticed a smaller prevalence of smokers among the students of medical field (17.2% smokers, 5.9% former smokers, 76.9% non-smokers) rather than their colleagues coming from other education fields (25.4% smokers, 6.3% former smokers, 68.3% non-smokers), as drawn in the chi-square test ($p < 0.001$). It seems, thus, that the medical students, due to their future job as leaders in the healthy sector, are aware that smoking, in their specific case, is neither ethical nor professional; therefore they mostly give up smoking (Lugoboni et al., 2014).

Table 8 – Tobacco smoking habits. Distribution by sex and age class.(percentage values)

	Sex*		Age class**			Total %
	Male %	Female %	18-19 %	20-24 %	25-34 %	
Non-smoker	63.9	73.1	73.6	64.3	62.6	69.5
Former smoker	7.5	5.4	5.0	7.3	10.4	6.2
Smoker	28.6	21.5	21.4	28.4	27.0	24.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

N=9,779

* $p < 0.001$

** $p < 0.001$

As far as the chosen type is concerned, smoking students prefer packaged cigarettes. However, thanks to the ongoing economic crisis or simply the current fashion, fine-cut tobacco is significantly appreciated, cheaper and used for roll cigarettes, which are chosen by around one in three smokers. On the contrary, pipe, cigar and electronic cigarettes are definitely less popular. Smokers' preferences depend on the variations in age and sex (ISS-DOXA, 2016): the *roll-your-own cigarettes*, for instance, are widespread especially among men and the youngest, in particular among people under 20 years old (table 9). Among cigarettes smokers (N. 2,257), the trend to smoke a maximum of 10 cigarettes per day belongs to the majority: 39.0% of them smoke up to 4 per day, 43.1% from 5 to 10, 16.1% from 11 to 20 and 1.8% are the most tenacious smokers, overtaking 20 cigarettes.

Table 9 – What do you smoke? Distribution by sex and age class. (percentage values)

	Sex*		Age class**			Total %
	Male %	Female %	18-19 %	20-24 %	25-34 %	
Packaged cigarettes	59.3	74.9	63.5	69.9	81.4	67.7
Roll cigarettes	37.3	23.8	34.0	28.1	16.4	30.0
Other (pipe, cigar, cigarillos)	2.6	1.0	2.2	1.3	1.3	1.7
Electronic cigarettes	0.8	0.3	0.3	0.7	0.9	0.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

N=2,341

*p<0.001

**p<0.001

Continuing with the analysis, drinking habits complete the framework of university students' lifestyle who were invited to express their view about the consumption of four alcoholic drinks: beer, wine, alcoholic aperitives and spirits (table 10).

Table 10 –How often do you drink...? Distribution by sex. (percentage values)

	Every day %	1-2 times a week %	Weekend %	Occasionally %	Never %	Total %
<i>Beer*</i>						
Male	5.1	14.8	23.4	40.7	16.0	100.0
Female	1.2	5.1	17.7	41.0	35.0	100.0
Total	2.7	8.9	19.9	40.9	27.6	100.0

N=9,837

*p<0.001

<i>Wine*</i>						
Male	4.1	7.0	4.9	47.7	36.3	100.0
Female	1.3	3.8	5.7	38.4	50.8	100.0
Total	2.4	5.0	5.4	42.0	45.2	100.0

N=9,701

*p<0.001

<i>Alcoholic aperitives*</i>						
Male	1.9	3.1	13.8	51.7	29.5	100.0
Female	0.5	1.3	13.3	49.7	35.2	100.0
Total	1.0	2.0	13.5	50.5	33.0	100.0

N=9,626

*p<0.001

<i>Spirits*</i>						
Male	1.8	1.9	11.1	43.5	41.7	100.0
Female	0.5	0.5	7.6	32.0	59.4	100.0
Total	1.0	1.0	8.9	36.5	52.6	100.0

N=9,582

*p<0.001

Concerning it, beer is the most widespread alcoholic drink among the young respondents, drunk by more than 70% of them. In line with the spreading of new youth trends, like the happy hour, also alcoholic aperitives achieve a high consensus, appreciated by two in three students. Conversely, wine, with more of 45% of non-drinker students and spirits, with more than half students who declare not to drink it, are less successful.

In a context where, besides the contraction of the daily alcohol consumers, the figure of occasional drinkers arises (ISTAT, 2016), also the students of the University of Bari prefer the occasional consumption rather than the daily one, with reference to all the analysed alcoholic beverages. Indeed, half of the students consume occasionally an alcoholic aperitif and the amount of students who sometimes choose to drink wine, beer or spirits is around 40%. The weekend represents the best time framework to drink beer or alcoholic aperitives. Lastly, beer and wine hold the record for number of people drinking every day or 1-2 times a week. Thus, the consumption of the respondents are supposed to be related to a recreational environment for socialising where alcohol stands for an aggregation element, thereby limited to some particular moments. Furthermore, from the distribution by sex, a greater prevalence of alcoholic drinkers among men, more than women, emerges. As a result, there is a gender gap, fluctuating between 19% for beer, about 15% for wine and spirits until 5.7% for alcoholic aperitives.

6. Conclusions

By conferring a central role to some specific facts susceptible of good manners, like those related to lifestyle, in order to achieve individual wellbeing, we play nothing but an active role to promote our health and to realize that it depends not just on external factors but, most importantly, on our willing to pursue and preserve it (Ottawa Charter, 1986). On the basis of this awareness this research has been conducted, acting as a tool for monitoring university students' lifestyle. What emerges from the analysis is the need of information about the relevance of physical activity, focusing in particular on the segment of population which is more likely to be inactive, that are female students. The data concerning food habits invite to reaffirm the importance of providing the body the right nutrition requirements during the different parts of the day, without skipping meals. The risk-taking behaviours, such as tobacco smoking and alcohol consumption, show the need to address the awareness-raising actions to both women and men. Hence, the findings of the current research urge to promote a culture of health and wellness through preventive measures and an efficient communication.

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SUMMARY

Analysis of students' lifestyle in the University of Bari Aldo Moro

The purpose of the present research was to increase knowledge about youth lifestyles, with a particular focus on university students. Indeed, the study was fostered by the Standing Committee "Generational Observatory" of the University of Bari Aldo Moro which is interested in monitoring its students' living and studying conditions in order to implement active policies. In particular, this research has involved students aged between 18 and 34 years, enrolled in the first of the three-year Bachelor Degree Courses, One-Cycle Master Degree Courses and Second-level Master Degree Courses, activated during the AY 2014/2015 at the University of Bari Aldo Moro. A web survey was used. Subsequently, data were performed using SPSS software. Univariate analyses, i.e., frequency distributions, and bivariate analyses, i.e., cross-tabulations, were computed. Several aspects related to university students' lifestyle were analyzed, e.g., physical activity, eating behaviours, tobacco smoking habits and alcohol consumption. The findings of the current research permit to identify the possible areas of intervention in order to promote a culture of health and wellness through preventive measures and an efficient communication.

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