



## Educational Process: International Journal

ISSN: 2147-0901 | e-ISSN: 2564-8020 | [www.edupij.com](http://www.edupij.com)

**Educational Process International Journal • Volume 9 • Issue 2 • 2020**

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**To cite this article:** Grünthal-Drell, M., Veigel, M. (2020). Health Education and Movement-Related Activities in Youth Work: Estonian Youth Workers' Opinions and Experiences. *Educational Process: International Journal*, 9(2), 103-121.

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2020.92.3>

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## Health Education and Movement-Related Activities in Youth Work: Estonian Youth Workers' Opinions and Experiences

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### Abstract

Several research studies have revealed that Estonia's youth are characterized by poor health indicators and decreasing levels of physical activity. Therefore it has become important to pay more attention to these topics within the context of youth work. Adult learner experiences, and their preparation and practice at university have a great deal of influence on their future choices. The aim of this research was to ascertain the importance of health education in the opinion of youth workers, including the importance of movement-related activities in youth work, and the readiness to communicate these topics to young people. The following research questions were formulated: (1) How do youth workers assess the development of skills related to health awareness and movement-related activities during their university studies?; (2) What is the role of, and what characterizes health education and movement-related activities in everyday youth work? Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with 15 Estonian youth worker specialists. The data was analyzed by means of inductive content analysis. The research results revealed that the acquisition of practical skills is very important for youth workers. It also became apparent that youth workers deal with health education on a daily basis. Movement-related activities are very often considered a priority by youth centers. It may be assumed that the preparation of students graduating from university is insufficient and that they feel insecure when starting work.

**Keywords:** Health education, movement-related activities, physical activity, youth work, young people.



DOI: 10.22521/edupij.2020.92.3

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EDUPIJ • ISSN 2147-0901 • e-ISSN 2564-8020

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## Introduction

Healthy individuals are an essential resource for the economic and social development of any society. Good health ensures better life quality and is a vital component of personal development (Janson, 2001). Current youth policy in Estonia conforms with healthcare policy, and youth work supports the values and attitudes that promote good health and lead to a healthy lifestyle (Noortevaldkonna arengukava 2014-2020 [Youth Work Development Plan 2014-2020], 2013). One of the aims of the “Renewed European Framework for Cooperation in the Youth Field 2010-2018” (Euroopa noortevaldkonna uuendatud koostööraamistik 2010–2018, 2009) is to support the health and wellbeing of young people. The emphasis of the framework is on sexual education and the reinforcement of mental health, as well as the promotion of sports, a healthy lifestyle, and physical activity in cooperation with schools, youth workers, healthcare specialists, and sports organizations.

Youth work encompasses a broad range of activities (e.g., social, cultural, educational, sports-related, and political) that can be carried out with, by, and for young people through both non-formal and formal learning (European Commission, 2018). In the youth field discourse, there should be a widespread perception of youth work as an educational sector and the youth worker as a practitioner of non-formal learning (Veigel, 2015). According to the 2010 Youth Work Act (Noorsootöö seadus, 2010), youth centers in Estonia are the main institutions that are currently carrying out youth work. As stated in level four of the Youth Work Occupational Standard (Noorsootöötaja Kutsestandard, 2018), by supervising various activities youth workers create the conditions for and also support non-formal education, including the health behaviors and environmentally sustainable lifestyle of young people. Non-formal learning is a goal-orientated learning process that supports the formation and development of personality, creativity, talent, initiative, and social responsibility, or the acquisition of necessary competences (Mitteformaalne, 2018). Non-formal education must be more efficient in supporting formal education and, together with formal education, in ensuring the sustainability of youth education, and thereby contributing to youth employment. Youth workers must understand the principles of non-formal learning and be able to lead the learning process.

Topics that are related to sports and movement-related activities are considered of significant interest to today’s youth. A survey by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Science (Haridus-ja Teadusministeeriumi aasta-analüüs, 2016), entitled “An analysis of the availability of youth information services and increasing user comfort,” stated that young people between the ages of 12 and 26 years old mainly search for information about learning options (51%), health (48%), and hobby education and activities (39%). According to a survey by Tallinn Sports and Youth Department (Tallinna Spordi-ja Noorsooamet, 2016), 39% of youngsters visited youth centers and one third of them went for sports activities, to cook, or to meet people who may be seen as interesting to them. The most popular activities included sports, media, and dance training. Therefore, specialists working with young people should be able to provide adequate answers to questions that are posed by young people, and provide activities that will help them to spend their leisure time purposefully, as well as guiding them away from risky behavior.

A survey of the health behaviors of Estonian students revealed that it is amongst the worst in Europe. Only 16% of students between the ages of 11 and 15 years old met the requirements for moderate daily physical activity (Aasvee & Rahno, 2015). The program,

entitled “The fundamentals of Estonian Sports Policy until 2030” (Eesti spordipoliitika põhialused aastani 2030, 2015) established expectations for increased activity, the achievement of which requires the comprehensive development of young people’s attitudes, including development supported by youth workers. One of the priorities is to reach the level of Nordic countries in terms of being active, as well as the number or participants who are active which means that, instead of today’s figure of 47%, at least two thirds of the population (i.e., 70%) have to be engaged in movement-related activities and sports.

In terms of health promotion, of which health education is an integral part, two approaches or ways of thinking may be observed: medical (disease-focused) and pedagogical (health-focused). The medical model for health education focuses upon the increase and development of health promotion and any related factors and which support the growth and development of young people. The pedagogical model focuses upon knowledge of educational psychology and educational philosophy, but also on an understanding of the values and meaning of health-promoting education and development. This approach makes possible the discussion of health as a value (Janson, 2001). The current study is based upon the pedagogical approach to health education.

The development of young people’s eating and activity habits via non-formal learning should comprehensively and consistently comprise various health-related and interesting activities. Focusing on risk behaviors (e.g., unhealthy eating, a sedentary lifestyle, reduced mobility) can help prevent numerous chronic diseases. In a survey entitled “The importance of informing young people about healthy eating habits,” which was conducted in 2014, a total of 85% of the respondents believed that youth workers could increase awareness concerning proper nutrition amongst youngsters by organizing thematic lectures, discussions, and question-and-answer sessions, or by inviting specialists to help on their behalf. A total of 61% of the respondents thought that healthy eating habits were discussed, but not to a sufficient level (Grünthal-Drell & Veigel, 2015).

Enhanced activity must be based on targeted health promotion and prevention. According to Estonia’s Public Health Act (Rahvatervise seadus, 2014), health education means the purposeful dissemination of information and the formation of people’s habits for the preservation and improvement of health. In childhood and teenage years, the brain undergoes particularly rapid development, with behavioral patterns formed during these years impacting on a person’s entire life (Crews, He, & Hodge, 2007; Fox, Levitt, & Nelson, 2010). From the perspective of health education, it is important to ensure that the desired change in behavior becomes habitual and the decision for change is made by considering values accepted by today’s young people (Streimann, Hansen, & Pertel, 2011).

#### *Research problem*

The preparation of youth workers graduating from higher education institutions should be sufficient and professionally applicable to today’s labor market needs. As the curriculum of youth work belongs to the Institute of Educational Sciences of Tallinn University, youth workers are, from a pedagogical perspective, viewed as being similar to teachers, with a responsibility to skillfully supervise the movement-related activities of youngsters by setting an example through their own values, motivation, and practical movement-related activities. The thorough preparation of youth workers and their professional dedication are essential prerequisites for high-quality youth work in the field. In addition to theoretical knowledge,

practical skills play an important role in the everyday work of youth workers, which is why it is vital to identify how health-related subjects, including practical tasks that are associated with movement-related activities, have created health awareness and health appreciation (with an example being attitudes) amongst youth workers.

The youth work curriculum of the Institute of Educational Sciences of Tallinn University was significantly updated between the academic years of 2013/2014 and 2016/2017 (Noorsootöö eriala õppekavad). However, subjects related to health and practical skills creation in movement-related activities have been omitted from the curriculum. Health- and movement-related issues amongst youngsters have become an acute topic in Estonian society due to the poor health indicators of today's youth. Thanks to this, the researchers of the current study firmly believe that youth workers should be able to contribute to the development of young people's health and activity habits, serving as an important link in the improvement of public health in general.

The research problem of the current study can be outlined as follows: In connection with Estonian youths' poor health indicators, today's youth workers are confronted with the important task of developing the health-related habits of young people in order to improve public health. At the same time, health-related subjects have either decreased in number or have been completely omitted from the youth work curriculum of Tallinn University. The current research provides answers to questions about whether or not youth workers apply the knowledge and skills that they have acquired during their university education to their future professional life, and how those students who are currently finishing the curriculum describe their health-related knowledge and skills. The aim of the current research is therefore to ascertain the importance of health education, including movement-related activities, in today's youth work, and the readiness to communicate these topics to young people through examining the opinion of youth workers. Accordingly, the following research questions were formulated:

- How do youth workers assess the development of skills related to health awareness and movement-related activities during their university studies?
- What is the role of, and what characterizes health education and movement-related activities in everyday youth work?

#### *Research focus*

In comparison with other European countries in an international survey, the mean daily physical activity of the Estonian youth was found to be below average (Aasvee & Rahno, 2015). The number of young people who are tackling weight-related problems and health issues is increasing worldwide. The main reasons for weight gain include limited physical activity and an imbalanced diet (Marks et al., 2005). As the health indicators of young people demonstrate deteriorating tendencies, more attention should be paid to the promotion of a healthy lifestyle among the youth and the improvement of health awareness among youth workers, together with the development of their practical skills. It is vital to support the development of values and attitudes related to a healthy lifestyle amongst youth work students in order that they can apply it in their future professional working life.

The entire Youth Work Development Plan contributes to the goals of the Public Health Development Plan 2009-2020 (Rahvastiku tervise arengukava, 2008), particularly taking into account the following principle: "Youth work together with its measures supports the health of young people, and the values and attitudes that enhance a healthy lifestyle" (Euroopa

noortevaldkonna uuendatud koostööraamistik, 2009). Youth centers should support positive health behavior among young people, and aim their activities at increasing awareness and offering alternative activities as a substitute for risk behaviors (Paabort, 2013). Youth centers can arrange campaigns, summer camps, training sessions, projects and other activities in order to introduce the principles of a healthy lifestyle via different activities (Varava, Pitsi, & Oja, 2010).

Youth workers can encourage young people to lead a healthy lifestyle, support them in making personal choices, teach them to make independent decisions by developing their social skills and self-confidence through movement-related activities, and be there for young people when they experience mental or physical problems (Streimann et al., 2011).

The more positive youth workers' attitudes towards movement-related activities are, the greater the probability that they will utilize various activities in their everyday work whilst trying to organize recreational activities for young people. Therefore, in order to arrange non-formal learning, to promote healthy lifestyle choices among the youth, and to provide activities in the prevention of risk behaviors among young people, it is necessary to start by shaping the attitudes and values of future youth workers at the beginning of their university studies. Through active work focused on health and movement-related activities within the study group, future youth workers learn about practical requirements, rules, methods and self-assertion, the management of youth groups, and highly useful communication skills. A youth worker's own example is the best motivator for their students and, by engaging in movement-related activities together with young people, youth workers can create invaluable experiences for youngsters in their charge.

It is possible to learn and teach by using a very broad range of activities and methods. The university studies of newly-started youth work students must begin with the formation of the basis for the required skills upon which all necessary information and experience can accumulate. Health awareness in youth work, including skills related to movement-related activities and the guidance thereof, require special preparation and practical skills for any further work with the youth. Raadik (2009) stated that young people develop interest in something if the instruction makes them understand when, where, and why they might have need of the acquired knowledge, and then how it can be implemented. Youth work students are adult learners and, according to "Mezirow's Transformation Theory," it is important to take into account how learners describe and analyze, and how adult learners learn to denote meanings to their life experiences. During the transformative learning process, a person changes the limiting, hindering, and doubtful ways of thinking, which enable them to self-interpret their experiences more openly and reflectively (Mezirow, 2009). According to the "Theory of Action," learning occurs constantly during a person's activities, whereas according to the "Situated Learning Theory," learning takes place particularly during the resolution of problem tasks that resemble actual situations. Learning definitions without any practical-based activity are deemed insufficient, as definitions become understandable only when applied in practical situations (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Students' learning experiences and practice at university can considerably impact upon their future choices (Jõgi, Karu, & Krabi, 2015). According to Greeno (1998), knowledge should not be acquired separately from skills as they have to form combined personal experiences, and learning should be targeted to an individual's participation in social practices, both in school and in the wider community. It may be stated that skills required for youth work comprising the necessary movement-related activities cannot be obtained

without practical activity during university studies. Without participating in movement-related activities (e.g., games, hiking tours, etc.) and gaining relevant experience, it is not possible for learners to deal with the topics of this area as they generally lack self-confidence, as well as the required skills and experience.

### Methodology

This research applies a qualitative strategy that is based on a phenomenological approach, and which relies upon Husserl's view that all knowledge is based on personal experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), that objective knowledge can be found in experience, and that subjective experience is the source of truth. In order to collect the data, a guide was developed for the conducting of 15 individual semi-structured interviews, which were held during 2017. The average interview duration was 60 minutes, with the shortest being 45 minutes and the longest as 1 hour and 49 minutes. The interviews were each carried out either in a quiet location at the researchers' university or at the workplace of the interviewee. This approach was considered important in order to maintain objectivity, and also to create an atmosphere in which the interviewees would be sufficiently relaxed so as to share their experiences or viewpoints that could be deemed critical to their study experience. This inclusive research was led by two researchers.

The interviewees were encouraged to talk freely about their lives and in their own words, and entailed personal and informal communication between the researchers and interviewees (Kvale, 2006, p. 481). It is recommended that semi-structured interviews be used for data collection in studies where there is a large variation in the experience to be learnt, or where past events or sensitive topics are being studied (Hirsjärvi, Remes, & Sajavaara, 2007; Laherand, 2008). This also applies for areas of research that have been poorly acknowledged in the past, and even where a limited amount of research is involved (Hirsjärvi, Remes, & Sajavaara, 2007; Laherand, 2008). However, youth work is not considered an unusual field of research in Estonia, and the levels of professionalism in youth workers is often wide-ranging and characteristically random for those entering the field.

The purposive sample that was used in the current research consisted of 10 Estonian youth workers and five youth work students. The interviewees were aged between 21 and 37 years old, and consisted of 13 females and two males. All of the interviewees were selected based on the following criteria: a) they had graduated with Youth Work as their specialty from Tallinn Pedagogical College (which later merged with and was renamed Tallinn University), between 2006 and 2016, and were currently engaged in youth work (participant identifiers: YW1-YW10); or b) they were third-year undergraduate students (participant identifiers: S1-S5) undertaking their final year of study in the Youth Work specialty at Tallinn University. Whilst a total of 25 candidate participants were contacted through mailing lists, 10 were unable to allocate time to attend for interview or had insufficient practical youth work experience.

Two pilot interviews were conducted in order to test the interview guide, after which some of the questions were tailored to be more specific. The interviews were semi-structured in design, with open-ended questions supported by a specific interview guide for the purposes of data collection. The structure of the interviews was based on Laherand's (2008) description of how to construct a semi-structured interview: with each theme comprised of open-ended questions which allowed the interviewees to adequately express their thoughts. The interview plan included questions that were intended to define the

youth workers' background, which was necessary in order to clarify any assessment or requirements of the youth workers when it came to their youth work studies at the university. Some of the questions were aimed at identifying the health awareness of the youth workers and their need to undertake youth work. Some questions helped to identify the main activities of the youth workers' daily work; more specifically, the role of health education in their everyday work, including movement-related activities. Health education and movement-related activities in youth work were chosen as the phenomenon of study.

In order to be able to facilitate efficient analysis of the collected data, a mobile voice recorder was used to audio-record each of the interviews. The recordings were then forwarded by email to a transcription process which was conducted using Windows Media Player and Groove Music, which allows for repeated listening to the interview recordings.

Only a limited number of research participants agreed to collaborate, and the anonymity of the sample was ensured. Protecting and respecting the participants' rights to make decisions regarding their participation formed the core ethical principles that served to guide the treatment of the participants throughout the research. Prior to each interview being held, the participants were each informed about the purpose of the research and how the information that they would provide would then be used (e.g., through anonymous quotes). Participation in the study was voluntary, and the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. No questions of a sensitive subject nature were asked of the participants.

#### *Data analysis*

The transcribed interview data were analyzed using inductive content analysis. This approach was chosen because the interview data presented a collection of rich and detailed descriptions, and the researcher was then able to address and discuss topics as they emerged during each interviews' evaluation (Kvale, 1996). Inductive content analysis is considered particularly valuable when dealing with a specific phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Content analysis is defined as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) from the context of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004).

Qualitative content analysis was deemed to have been accurately conducted. Attention was drawn to rarities or unique phenomena identified from the interviewees' responses. The analysis was considered tightly textual; which does not reduce the richness of the texts or the nuances of the numerical codes generated, nor simplify or distort the phenomenon under investigation. It is precisely through the inductive approach to data analysis that the strengths of qualitative content analysis is best identified – the research participants' understanding of the world, and the study of their interpretations and meanings. The first step was to perform an analysis of the detailed research data, which later formed the subcategories (Kalmus, Masso, & Linno, 2015). The second step was to collate the subcategories into higher level categories based on similar codes, which made it possible to investigate the relationships between them (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Kalmus et al., 2015). The process of categorization continued for as long as the data allowed, up until a point of saturation was achieved (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). As a final step, the detailed analysis of the phenomenon was written.

In order to ensure validity, triangulation was applied in the analysis of the interview data (Creswell, 2009), with two researchers having independently analyzed the data and later



worked together so as to adjust the subcategories and main categories where agreed appropriate. There were a total of 25 subcategories which, in turn, were grouped under three main categories: (1) University studies and subjects that support skills development; (2) Health education and health awareness of youth workers; and, (3) Everyday work of youth workers. The categories, subcategories, and excerpts from the interview transcripts are presented in Table 1.

## Results

The research provided an overview of the opinions of youth workers with regard to their undergraduate university studies within the context of the development of health awareness and movement-related activities, as well as their own health awareness and their considered importance of health education, content, and resources in the practicing of youth work.

**Table 1.** Health/activity studies and youth workers' interview transcript excerpts

Category	Subcategories	Interview excerpts
University studies and subjects that support skills development	Satisfaction with acquired skills and knowledge	I acquired a very strong basis from the university, all of my knowledge comes from there, although I participated in sports activities before that. [YW5, studied 2010-2013] My basic knowledge comes from my university studies. I like it and I have trained my children for years at camps, and then later on training courses. [YW9] I think we acquired a really impressive basis. Checks were carried out to ensure that we understood and that we were practicing everything we'd learnt. [YW3]
	Importance of practical movement-related subjects in study program	I remember a hiking trip with our group, staying overnight in heated tents, eating food that had been prepared on the fire – it was essential to our learning. [YW5] At camps, those youth workers who played 'America' (author: a game similar to throwing a basketball) in the evening with young people were highly popular, and I also liked to play along with them. It's important to spend time with the youngsters. [YW7] Actually, youth workers need to have a stock of games in their head just in case situations involving young people in their charge suddenly change. Future youth workers need to know certain information off by heart. [YW1] Everyday youth work is not work carried out between four walls; it includes hiking and camps, and is a specialty that is full of movement. [YW2] I can't even imagine how universities could prepare professional youth workers without these practical movement-related subjects. [YW8]

Category	Subcategories	Interview excerpts
	Creation of perceptions and knowledge (e.g., terminology, methods, tips), and positive responses	Practical studies gave me a lot: the terms and phrases used for gymnastics positions; how to give commands to young people. I didn't obtain these skills from high school. [YW7, studied 2008-2011] Also, methods for grouping children into teams, and all kinds of rules for various sports games. [YW4] Every day we studied the process of communication through practical lessons that involved movement-related games etc. [YW3]
	Self-made portfolio prepared within a subject (Health Education)	I still have this portfolio of various games on my shelf. The boys know this, and sometimes they have taken a look at these games too. Sometimes I myself also go through the portfolio and do something that provides development through game-playing, or use some form of activity from the portfolio. [YW9]
	Lack of practical subjects	There should be more practical subjects because lectures that are held only in auditoriums don't really provide enough. [S4, studied 2014-2017] Unfortunately, I must say that practices and disciplines concerning health education and movement-related activities at university have remained in the background. [S2, studied 2014-2017] Universities should include swimming lessons, because youth workers are responsible for young people at camps and so on, and swimming is very important for young people in the summer. [YW8], [S5]
Health education and health awareness of youth workers	Young people's daily activity norms and practices	Young people need to spend time outdoors and be physically active for at least 1 hour a day. [YW2] Young people should be active for between 2 and 5 hours each day out in the fresh air. [YW4] We go outside as much as possible, riding on skateboards, scooters, etc. [YW7]
	Mental health, symptoms of depression	We invited a psychologist to our mental health day. As a result, some youngsters felt encouraged to then go and see that particular specialist later. [YW5] Sometimes young people can be aggressive or too emotional; you have the impression that they may explode! [YW1]
	Healthy diet	The problem is rather with certain young people who don't eat food of high nutritional value, have a poor diet, or just eat too little. [YW6] For example, eating potato crisps is not allowed in our youth center. Energy drinks are also now prohibited. [YW2]

Category	Subcategories	Interview excerpts
	Sexual behavior	We have a bowl of condoms and anyone can take them anonymously. They disappear really quickly, but we continue to add more. [YW3]
	Engagement in health education	Youth workers should be quite competent when it comes to living a healthy lifestyle as well as being fully aware of topics that relate to healthy eating, since it is a youth worker's job to promote the wellbeing of young people. [YW5] We teach young people how to prepare healthy food: we have a carrot week, and they lay the table etc. [YW2] Youngsters have the chance to be able to prepare or perform a form of activity such as aerobic dancing with music. [YW7]
	Youth workers' own leisure activities	Youth workers have to set an example... They must be physically active and in good physical condition; we can't say that exercising is important if we do not exercise ourselves. [YW6]
	Low-level daily activity of young people (e.g., hiking, games, dancing)	I was angry when my mother told me to come home while I was outside. Nowadays, young people tend to sit indoors with their digital stuff. [YW4] Youngsters spend the whole day at school without moving, and then they come to the youth centers and want to continue sitting down; we can't let them do that. [YW3]
	Health awareness levels of youth workers (good or very good)	Youth workers must have so many different competences to enable them to notice young people's problems, and such a level of awareness is all related to the topic of health. [YW2] We try to set an example ourselves with our eating habits. [YW1]
	Adventure activities	I would take part in all forms of outdoor or practical activities. [YW4] The hiking course was one of the most important experiences in relation to practicing outdoor activities in our work. [YW8]
	First experience guiding a group	I think young people want to be active, but you must motivate them, you must have 'baggage' for this (in the form of ideas or tools). [YW10]

Category	Subcategories	Interview excerpts
Everyday work of youth workers	Most frequent health issues in youth workers' daily work	We deal with the problem of nutrition every day. If they eat only white bread, we need to explain what constitutes a healthy diet. [YW7] The frequency of movement-related activities is different in every youth center; we really ensure we do something every day such as going for a walk. We try to engage in sports-related activities every week or play active movement-related games, which take place about two or three times a month. [YW6]
	Acute importance of health issues	We have established it as one of the priorities of the center's action plan, this topic of health and movement-related activities. [YW5] For some young people our movement-related activities are the only ones they engage in. [YW6] There are projects to promote youth activity. [YW3]
	Additional health education training for youth workers	There have been no training courses on movement-related activities. I would send my youth workers there any time. For example, a practical training course on the topic of movement-related games would be superb. [YW4]
	Popular health-related websites	Various websites that cover training and movement-related activities are very popular. [YW8] I don't know the names that well. I have to Google them first. [YW10]
	Health promotion needs	We carry out workshops about health and physical activity. [YW4] Drugs... We talked to them and explained in every way that we do not tolerate them. [YW5] We can't just say to young people that being active is important when our own lifestyle isn't that healthy. [YW7]
	Sports and dance activities	There is some kind of a hike being organized every month. [YW3] We have the chance of being able to go to the gym and do everything there, such as running, jumping, and dancing. [YW1] We ride on skateboards, jump on the trampoline, or play various movement-related games etc. [YW7] Then we have extreme sports days where we ride on skateboards and bikes etc. [YW9]

*Health and activity studies within Tallinn University's youth work curriculum*

It was considered important that university studies constitute the basis for both theoretical and practical professional experience of student youth workers, whilst also contributing to the development of their social skills.

Whether university studies create the requisite perceptions and knowledge (e.g., terminology for guiding young people, hand gestures, methods and tips) may be debatable, especially in terms of providing the required positive outlook, opportunities, experiences, and framing skills that relate to conducting and supervising activities according to the majority of the interviewees. The students' responses revealed that all of the subjects were deemed necessary in some way, but that there was a lack of practical subjects.

*Perhaps this kind of practice would also help to increase self-confidence. [YW5]*

As a very important aspect of their university studies, half of those interviewees with previous experience in the field of youth work mentioned that subjects that involved hiking and activity games should be included in the study program.

Several of the interviewees emphasized the importance of practical study assignments and gaining experience during university studies, which those respondents who were still studying were unable to discuss. Most interviewees had previously participated in one or more sports-related training sessions; however, movement-related activities or motor skills training was seldom mentioned. All of the interviewees who were already working in the field considered it very important to study practical movement-related subjects at university. The lessons were prepared, and they participated in the wearing and use of certain athletic equipment, whilst also practicing various activities with their study group, and was actually their first experience in guiding a group. The interviewees recommended that the same subjects be added to the curriculum for youth work, with at least two such subjects being made compulsory.

There were some areas of conflict between the responses of those interviewees with more experience and the university students with regards to subjects that were related to activity and activity-based skills in the field of youth work. At that stage, the students had not yet gained sufficient experience to be able to affect their perception of the matter.

*Health awareness in youth workers*

Most interviewees rated their health awareness as being "very good" or simply "good." Many of the interviewees considered themselves to be more competent in theoretical knowledge, yet admitted that in order to mediate practical knowledge, further self-development would be necessary. As for the skills required for the guiding of sports-related activities, all of the interviewees who were working in the field considered themselves as confident (as opposed to the students).

Half of the interviewees mentioned that they had explained the basics of first-aid to the young people in their charge, with topics covered having ranged from bandaging a wound to calling an ambulance. The interviewees were worried about cases involving young people's mental health, but they also included cases that involved smoking, alcohol, and drugs.

*Drugs... Young people have smoked cannabis in the city, but they have also done so at camp, once, during a hike. We thought about what to do and this involved a good deal of dilemma. We should normally have sent them back home... Then we talked to them and explained that we would not tolerate such behavior in any way whatsoever... We then decided that they could remain at the camp. [YW8]*

*Health education and movement-related activities in everyday youth work*

The following aspects related to health issues served to create associations amongst the interviewees: first-aid at the youth center; handwashing; a healthy diet; values that need to be addressed amongst young people (including communication through play or learning); and health promotion (e.g., various movement-related activities, basketball competitions, slider races, workshops, or a handwashing day). Such aspects were also related to health and everyday activities; in several youth centers it was possible for young people to go in for sports-related activities (such as hobby groups involved in dance, yoga, or martial arts training), and one youth center had a free weekly dance studio for young people.

It was revealed that the daily work of youth workers with young people involved the most common health-related issues: eating and maintaining a healthy diet; obesity; poor diet; and, nutrition.

Topics that were mentioned less often, but which were also important, included: drinking alcohol; tobacco smoking; using cannabis; mental health and relationships; electronic cigarette usage; sports, training, and general fitness; lack of exercise; school-based stress and tiredness; sexual behavior (SOS pills, other pills, or menstrual cycle calculations); using a smartphone and its effect on young people's wrists and neck, and so on.

One youth worker with 11 years of working experience revealed a significant fact in that the treatment of various health topics depends upon the youth worker's own levels of confidence and competence, as well as the ways in which one's knowledge is shared. In addition, the heads of two youth centers and one youth worker all said that much depends on the youth center's priorities.

*It all depends on where you work. [YW3]*

*One practice (author: compulsory internship) was completely health-related, while at another health-related issues never came up. [YW9]*

Half of the interviewees mentioned the values and competence of youth workers as being important, as well as setting an example themselves when conveying the subject of health education to young people. The interviewed youth worker students also considered health issues to be very important, but when they had to convey their knowledge to young people, they did not feel sufficiently confident to be able to approach it properly.

Research results showed that in the multifaceted and intensive youth work landscape, youth workers need to have time to engage in health education, and this is valued.

*I would not immediately class it as health education, but we integrate movement-related activities everywhere. [YW3]*

At half of the youth centers, various movement-related activities for young people were supported by the surrounding environment and conditions. Therefore youth workers did not have to spend too much time going to different places in order to spend time with young people (e.g., skate parks, forests, health trails, large gyms, traffic areas, school stadiums). The health education of young people was conducted through daily communication, somewhat adventurous activities, and a variety of mind games (e.g., quizzes). Likewise, youth workers organized workshops and lectures, information days, discussion groups, thematic weeks, and health camps. Health-related events were described as popular.

Of all the movement-related activities, the following were mentioned most frequently: activity games (e.g., various running and ball-oriented games, competitions), hiking (e.g., bike trips, visiting hiking trails, hiking near the sea), dancing (e.g., folk dances, show dances), and spending time in the fresh air, either in nature or just by out walking (e.g., by the sea, in the woods, or on hiking trails). The students did not consider hiking to be one of the most important or enjoyable physical activities for young people. Only after additional questioning did it become evident that they lacked the preparation or confidence to take young people off hiking, with information sought via the Internet in relation to games involving greater levels of physical activity.

*There were no hiking-related subjects, nor any hiking trips, or any form of educational activities. I would not dare to do too many things by myself. For example, I would seek guidance from a specialist if I wanted to go hiking. [S4]*

*Maybe I would go hiking with just two or three young people, but not with ten of them. [S1]*

A positive finding from the research was that all of the interviewees had a very versatile, active, and healthy lifestyle in addition to their daily activities with young people.

## Discussion

Maintaining and strengthening young people's health is a common task for all adults. Due to the constant deterioration of young people's health indicators, it is important to note this and to target it professionally through organized youth work. A positive attitude amongst youth workers towards movement-related activities increases the probability that they will also employ such activities when working with young people. A contemporary youth worker should be an organizer of non-formal learning processes that support motivation and self-esteem, rather than seen as just an informational resource. With this in mind, youth work students need to be equipped with a well-considered level of preparation in educational theory and health education, as well as practical experience in various movement-related activities, and this should take place as part of their university education. Jögi et al. (2015) explained that student learning experiences and practices at university greatly affect their subsequent choices. Based on this, it is possible, therefore, to draw the following conclusions:

1. If there are no opportunities for self-exertion, instruction, or experience in movement-related activities (e.g., games, dancing, acrobatics, adventure activities, swimming, hiking, skiing, skating etc.) during the university period, future youth workers may not be able to adequately address these topics by themselves as teachers, or may lack the confidence to do so due to a lack of previous experience and/or insufficient knowledge.
2. Estonia's "Renewed European Framework for Cooperation in the Youth Field 2010-2018" (Euroopa noortevaldkonna uuendatud koostööraamistik, 2009) includes a specific goal to support young people's health and wellbeing. Those interviewees who had graduated from university prior to 2016 considered it very important to have practical subjects in the field of youth work, and highlighted the importance of learning and teaching various movement-related activities and the skills associated with these areas, both for themselves and their group, without which they could not imagine working with young people.

3. All expectations of the interviewees were fulfilled during their university studies, and their studies were considered as having formed the basis of both their theoretical knowledge and their initial practical experience, but that it was also a supporter of social skills. Greeno (1998) emphasized that knowledge cannot be separated from skills; it is inadequate just to learn concepts from activities alone, as concepts are only intermediaries fully understood through their practical application. Those students who were in their final year of university mentioned a lack of practical subjects. Raadik (2009) argued that interest always emerged in the learning process where the topic included emotional hooks, and where it was deemed justified and applicable to the profession being studied, whilst also highlighting the importance of students being professionally instructed.
4. Most interviewees considered their health awareness levels as “good” or “very good,” but also mentioned the need for self-improvement. With regards to the skills required for supervising movement-related activities, the more experienced interviewees felt confident, which suggests that they obtained good levels of professional training. Their strengths included the ability to conduct dance activities, as well as activity and adventure games in open nature. However, the same could not be said about those students still undertaking their studies, who reportedly had no preparation or experience in this area, and also no confidence in any of the aforementioned activities prior to their involvement in the field of youth work.
5. According to the Estonian National Institute of Health Development (Tervise Arengu Instituut, 2017), risk behaviors related to eating disorders has significantly increased amongst young people. It can also be concluded from the current research that the interviewees were often involved in the development of healthy eating habits in young people and this, in turn, demonstrated a sense of responsibility towards the health of today’s youth.
6. Based on a survey regarding the health of Estonian students (Aasvee & Rahno, 2015), only 16% between the ages of 11 and 15 years old met the criteria for daily physical activity. The current research revealed that almost all interviewees had prioritized movement-related activities at their youth centers. It also became evident that youth workers took into account activities related to health and sports when compiling action plans or development plans. This means that, upon graduation, youth workers are seen as being equipped with sufficient skills for the supervision of movement-related activities, as well as having the requisite levels of health-related knowledge.
7. All of the interviewees emphasized health as a value, and considered topics that were related to it to be important and consistently formed part of their daily youth work with health-related issues integrated within their activities. As for positive results, the interviewees possessed basic levels of knowledge on the methods of health education used on a daily basis (e.g., teaching handwashing techniques or a healthy diet), on a weekly basis (e.g., hobby groups, cooking groups, a carrot week, etc.), on a monthly basis (e.g., holding an information day, a health day, quizzes etc.), on a seasonal basis (e.g., tournaments, holding a health month), and even perhaps just once or twice a year (e.g., holding a health week). Amongst the list of movement-related activities conducted with young people, the interviewees mostly mentioned hiking, activity games, and activities involving dancing or walking. The university students who were interviewed most frequently mentioned games that could be played indoors, or those that involved problem-solving. It was, however, possible to



note the students' lack of practical skill in guiding movement-related activities, which may influence their future careers as youth workers. It seemed that the students lacked confidence with regard to health-related movement-related activities.

8. Half of the interviewees mentioned the values of youth workers, their competence levels, and as setting personal examples when it came to communicating health education to young people in their charge. According to Levitt and Moorhead (2013), one has to be able to give meaning to and see the negative or positive effect of personal values. At the same time, those interviewees who managed youth centers mentioned concerns with regards to the recruitment of competent youth workers who possess the necessary skills to engage young people in movement-related activities. Janson (2001) argued that one of the main goals of health education, as well as movement-related activities, is to influence a change in a person's behavior towards an increased focus on health. A generalization can be made here that university studies, combined with a sufficient number of health-related subjects, can significantly impact on the choices that youth workers make in order to lead a healthy lifestyle.

Once established, habits become a daily support system when it comes to valuing health and movement. This conforms to the Youth Work Occupational Standard (Noorsootötaja Kutsestandard, 2018) which states that youth workers should create the conditions for and support young people's non-formal education, which includes their health behavior, via their supervision of various activities. Therefore, in order to improve public health, greater effort should be made so as to ensure that university graduate youth workers are able to offer movement-related activities as an alternative to risk-related behaviors, whilst having the necessary skills to guide movement-related activities, being able to teach young people, and having the confidence, knowledge, and skills needed to safely engage young people in physical activities.

## Conclusions

Young people who are physically active are also usually motivated and full of energy. Physical activity is a recognized trigger for coherence, drive, and positivity. As a specialty, youth work is on the curricula of the Institute of Education Sciences of Tallinn University. From a pedagogical aspect, the researchers of the current study found that youth workers are the equal of teachers, and therefore should be able to skillfully direct young people's movement-related activities following their everyday lessons by setting themselves as an example, along with the corresponding values and motivation, and should therefore be able to offer practical movement-related activities to young people.

The current research revealed that addressing health-related issues and conducting movement-related activities in everyday youth work is extremely important, and that this is supported by appropriate subjects and topics taught at the undergraduate level in universities. The student participants who graduated in 2017 were doubtful in terms of their own skills at supervising movement-related activities, and of their choice of methods to be able to achieve this, as they had not previously experienced or practiced the corresponding subjects. The interviews, it was found, made them really consider the necessity of such subjects.

The current research made it possible to derive the following recommendations for youth workers in terms of their improved health awareness (including those skills related to guiding movement-related activities):

1. Undergraduate university programs teaching the basic subjects for youth work as a specialty should involve methods and/or topics that focus on physical activities or which are integrated into movement-related activities; and health-related subjects should also be included in the Master's degree program for Youth Work Management;
2. The youth work higher education curriculum for should contain at least two compulsory subjects on health and activity, as well as two subjects on movement-related activities (e.g., anatomy, activity games, active lifestyle habits, athletic and healthy activities, movement-related activities, fitness, activities involving dance etc.);
3. Curricula should be supplemented with movement-related activities, physical activity internships, hiking practice, adventure education, swimming, and physical activities in nature as part of a compulsory internship or as part of the subjects themselves.

The results of the current research may be applied on different levels: as part of the development of the youth work curricula in universities in order to support the improvement of health awareness amongst youth work students and in the acquisition of the skills needed for supervising movement-related activities; and also to diversify the work of youth workers via different examples associated with health and movement-related activities. Those working within the field of youth work have to be able to provide a level of health education in order to increase young people's awareness levels, making it primary and essential that it is practiced at universities.

## Notes

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