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POPULARIZATION OF FITNESS CLUBS AND THE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY OF UPPER SILESIA INHABITANTS

Background. Today's pursuit of high socio-economic status predisposes to low physical activity. Health promotion has an impact on propagating fitness clubs and active lifestyle. The aim of the study was to establish the relationship between fitness clubs popularization and the physical activity of Upper Silesian inhabitants. **Material and methods.** There were 200 questionnaires distributed among people aged 19–64 years; 150 respondents provided feedback for further analysis. The inclusion criterion was active participation in fitness club activities in Upper Silesia and Cieszyn Silesia. The data were collected by means of the authors' own questionnaire. **Results and conclusions.** The main media factor influencing the popularity of fitness clubs was web advertising. Gym and group activities turned out the most common forms of exercise. The large age span of the study group indicated a growing interest in physical activity not only among young people. Most respondents noted a positive effect of regular exercise on their well-being and health.

Key words: fitness clubs, physical activity, lifestyle

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, despite constant technology development, the society increasingly draws attention to the state of their physical and mental health.

In the past, the major part of the community performed physical work. The activities of daily life required more energy, and entertainment and relaxation took the form of a variety of physical activities. The broadly understood progress has resulted in mostly sedentary work and passive leisure.

Kuba et al. (2005) pays attention to the fact that a new type of human, *homo sedentarius*, has emerged. This leads to the development of civilization diseases, among which obesity is the leading one. Nutrition behaviours play a significant role. Consumed products are highly processed and genetically modified. Biernat (2014) maintains that advances in medical science have made the average life expectancy longer, but research also indicates that the aging processes begin earlier and progress much faster than in the previous generations; thus, symptoms of civilization disorders begin to appear at an earlier age.

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In the recent 10 years, an increasing interest in healthy lifestyle has been observed. The society has begun to realize that civilization development has led to a gradual neglect of physical culture, and the effects are felt painfully. Over the years, fashion for activity has become so popular that people of all ages find it hard to imagine a day without doing any physical activity. Thanks to modern technologies, a wide range of possibilities for active leisure time have been created. The popularity of this type of recreation has led to the emergence of a 'wellness' stream that promotes physical activity, body care, conscious nutrition, and life in harmony with nature (Bazuń, 2013). People have started to leave their homes, walk, run, practise various sports, and take part in fitness classes. This type of lifestyle has become fashionable in modern times. One could even come to the conclusion that this is the beginning of a new subculture.

The show-business world is often a source of inspiration for taking up physical activity. People have insight into the lives of celebrities, who cannot afford a bad image in front of cameras; we want to follow the celebrities' example. We take care of our silhouette, apply diets, want to be fit. For those who identify themselves with the above-mentioned fitness subculture, a bottle of mineral water has become an indispensable element of training and physical activity in modern times.

FITNESS HISTORY

Fitness is a socio-cultural trend, spread throughout the world and motivating to take care of one's health and figure. It is also a way of life and spending leisure time, the form of physical activity most often undertaken in the modern society. Fitness is sometimes referred to as recreational gymnastics.

The beginning of fitness dates back to the 1970s. Dr Kenneth Cooper, who at the time was conducting research on the condition of astronauts, is considered as a precursor of fitness. The results of his research became the basis for the methodology and guidelines of aerobic exercises. A significant impact in the popularization of fitness was exerted by the actress Jane Fonda. In search of an effective way of rehabilitation, she began to exercise with the rhythm of music. The effects inspired her to open a Los Angeles fitness club called Fonda's Studio.

In Poland, the fashion for being 'fit' emerged in the 1980s. The pioneer instructor of aerobics in our country was the gymnast Hanna Fidusiewicz. Thanks to her involvement in Warsaw, the first fitness club called 'Under the hill,' specializing in aerobics classes, was created.

Fitness is divided into leisure and performance. General sport is clearly distinguished from competitive sport, the latter being characterized by sports competition and the purpose of attaining the best possible sports result (Leszczyńska, 2013). When talking about recreational activities, one means individual and group activities and gym exercise. It is also worth mentioning about dance forms, including choreography, and activities focused on building muscle mass or reducing it. Different forms of fitness may have combined goals and the participant can work on strength and weight reduction at the same time. What is essential is choosing the right training program, tailored to one's individual needs.

Fitness is also a sports discipline. Formerly, it belonged to the bodybuilding categories, but now it has become a separate discipline, between bodybuilding, dance, and beauty

contests. Fitness has been divided into two categories: gymnastics and silhouette fitness. Gymnastics is practised by men and women who are passionate about gymnastics, acrobatics, and dancing. Silhouette fitness is a contest in which the participants present their figures. It requires a harmonious structure developed through heavy, long-lasting strength training, aerobics, and appropriate eating habits.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study was to evaluate the significance of fitness clubs popularization, their availability, and innovation in the context of physical activity among Upper Silesia inhabitants.

The specific objectives were:

1. To identify the way of popularizing fitness clubs that has the greatest impact on motivation for physical activity.
2. To point at the type of physical activity preferred by people who train in fitness clubs.
3. To determine the subjective effects of physical exercise observed by the subjects attending fitness clubs.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The original questionnaire was distributed to 200 people aged 19–64 years, residents of Upper Silesia; 150 of them provided their feedback. In the study group ($n = 150$; 100%), there were 87 (58%) women and 63 (42%) men. The inclusion criterion for the study was active participation in fitness club activities in the Silesia province. The selection of the respondents was random.

First, the authors' questionnaire collected general information on education, place of residence, and professional and material status. The questions were both closed and open. The second part included questions concerning the reasons and motivating factors for physical activity in fitness clubs. Then, the participants were asked about the role and importance of mass media in their decision to start physical activity, fitness club membership, and attendance. Then the respondents determined the frequency of their participation in club activities, the presence of a personal trainer, and physical activity other than that practiced in fitness clubs. The final questions were related to the type of physical activities undertaken during club activities, the assessment of the subjective and objective health benefits, and the possible negative effects of training. Questions were also included about the respondents' knowledge of physical activity impact on the organism.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics were determined (Tab. 1). The study group involved 150 people. There were 87 women and 63 men. The youngest participant was 19 years old and the oldest 64 years old. The average height of the respondents amounted 164.56 cm for women and 179.14 cm for men. A large standard deviation can be observed in the case of body mass: 10.71 for women and 15.23 for men.

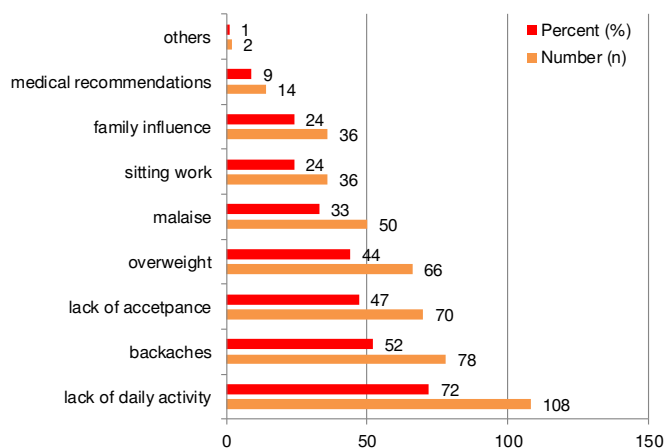
Tab. 1. General characteristics of the study group ($n = 150$)

Variable		Average	Min.	Max.	SD
Age (years)	Women	37.60	21	64	10.88
	Men	34.35	19	63	12.57
Height (cm)	Women	164.56	153	179	5.38
	Men	179.14	167	192	5.72
Body mass (kg)	Women	64.55	48	89	10.71
	Men	86.80	61	150	15.23

Tab. 2. Characteristics of the study group ($n = 150$): socio-demographic data

Variable		n	%
Education	Primary	5	3
	Vocational	23	15
	Secondary	29	19
	Higher	95	63
Professional status	Professionally active	102	68
	Student	29	19
	Pensioner	9	6
	Unemployed	11	7
Place of residence	Town	110	73
	Village	41	27

The majority of the respondents had higher education and were professionally active. Only a small percentage had primary education. There were also unemployed in the study group. As many as 73% were city inhabitants, and the remaining 27% lived in a village of the Silesia province (Tab. 2).

Fig. 1. Characteristics of the study group ($n = 150$): causes for physical activity

The most common cause for undertaking exercise was sedentary lifestyle, and the smallest number of participants declared to be encouraged by medical recommendation (Fig. 1). The most influential means of encouragement to start fitness activity in a fitness club was advertising, and the Internet turned out the most preferred form of media (Fig. 2).

The research shows that 79% of respondents had heard of fitness clubs for more than 3 years before. In addition, almost 43% had attended a club for more than 3 years (Fig. 3). A significant number of the participants (61%) additionally performed other physical activities besides training in a fitness clubs.

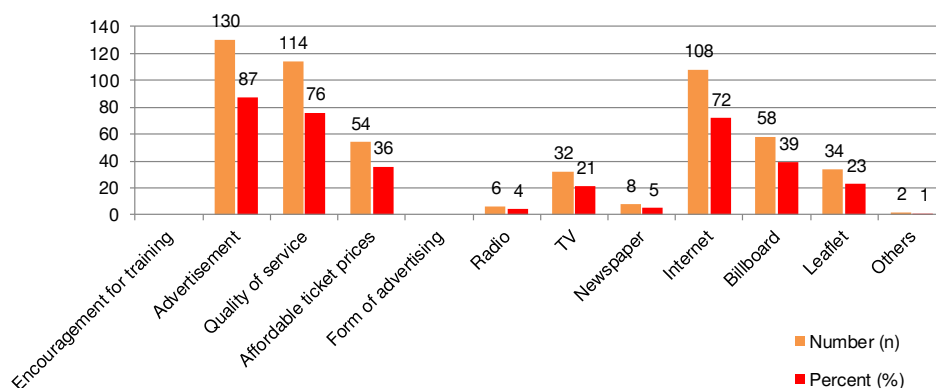


Fig. 2. Characteristics of the study group ($n = 150$): encouragement for training and the form of advertising

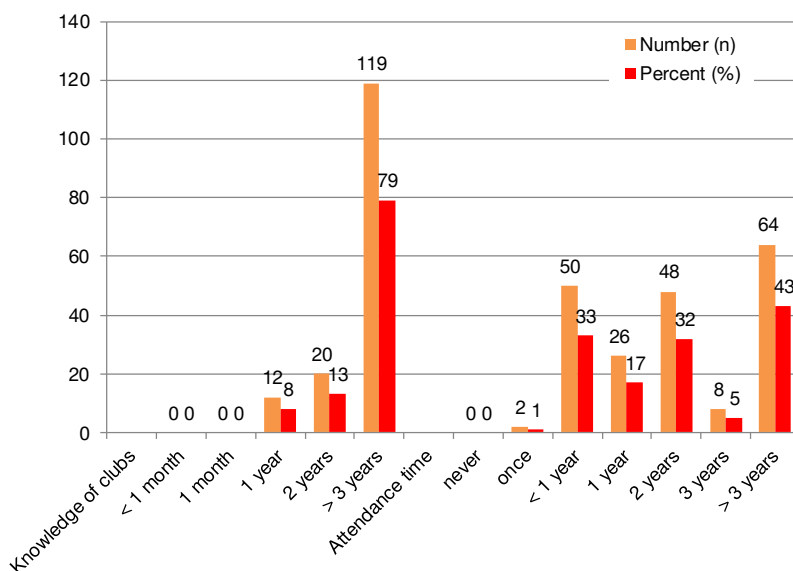


Fig. 3. Characteristics of the study group ($n = 150$): time of knowledge and fitness club attendance

Tab. 3. Characteristics of the study group ($n = 150$): training frequency and duration

Variable	n	%
Number of workouts per week		
Every day	3	2
1–2 times per week	69	46
3–4 times per week	46	31
5–6 times per week	9	6
Irregular	23	15
Duration of one-time training		
Less than 1 h	48	32
From 1 to 2 h	68	45
2 h and more	35	23

Tab. 4. Characteristics of the study group ($n = 150$): the observed effects on well-being and general health

Variable	n	%
Weight loss	77	51
Well-being	110	73
Acceleration of metabolism	27	18
Increase in physical activity	60	40
Sleep improvement	18	12
Decrease of back pain	42	28
Body shape improvement	86	57
Faster regeneration of the body	6	4

Almost half of the respondents (46%) trained in the club 1–2 times a week. A small percentage (2%) practiced everyday; 66% of the participants trained without a supervision of a professional. The research shows that the trainees most often spent 1–2 hours (45%) in the club; 23% trained for more than 2 h at a time (Tab. 3).

The most commonly chosen club activities were the group classes and gym (128 participants each) (Fig. 4). The most preferred forms of group activities were aerobics and Pilates (Fig. 5).

As shown in Table 4, as many as 110 respondents noted an increase in their well-being after regular exercise, 86 individuals observed body shape improvement, and 77 – weight loss (each participant could indicate the maximum of 3 responses). With regard to the occurrence of negative effects of physical activity, only 3% of the surveyed felt unwell after regular training. There were only 2 people who did not notice any improvement after regular physical activity.

More than half of the participants (60%) stated that their physical activity level was higher as compared with their peers, 6% considered it lower, 34% – the same.

Another question was to check the respondents' knowledge of the impact of physical activity on the human body. Among the 10 responses, 6 were true. The participants were asked to mark all aspects that they considered correct. Most of them had no doubt that physical activity slowed the aging process, reduced the risk of cardiovascular disease, and accelerated metabolism (Fig. 6).

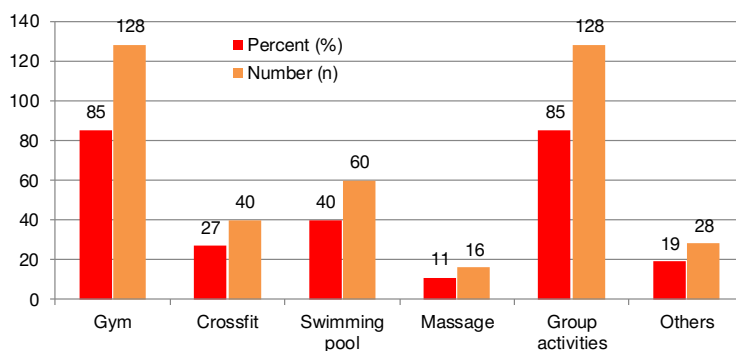
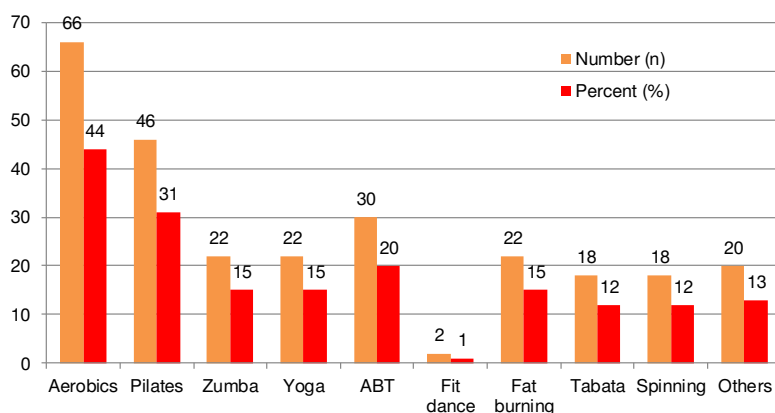
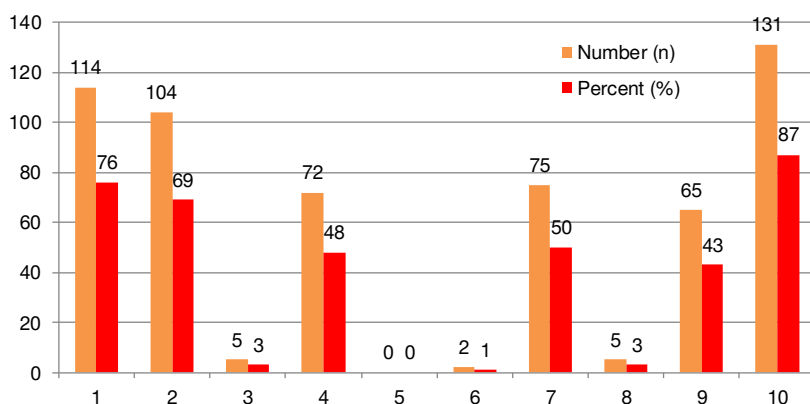


Fig. 4. Characteristics of the study group ($n = 150$): the preferred type of fitness club activities



ABT – abdominal-buttocks-thighs

Fig. 5. Characteristics of the study group ($n = 150$): the preferred form of group activities



1 – delays the aging process, 2 – reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, 3 – affects negatively the respiratory system, 4 – improves intestinal peristalsis, 5 – leads to osteoporosis, 6 – accelerates osteoarthritis, 7 – increases immunity, 8 – does not affect the nervous system, 9 – lowers blood pressure, 10 – accelerates metabolism

Fig. 6. Characteristics of the studied group ($n = 150$): knowledge of the effects of physical activity on the human body

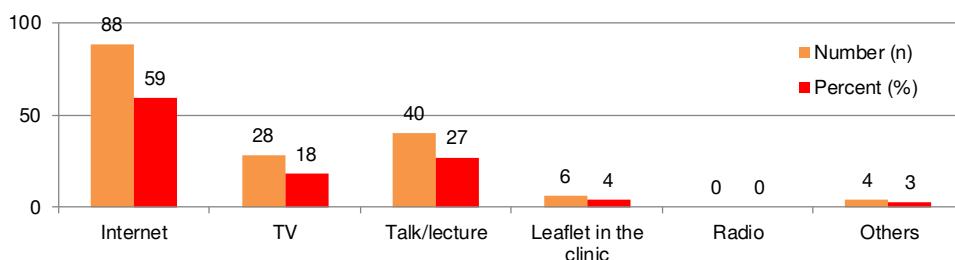


Fig. 7. Characteristics of the study group ($n = 150$): the preferred form of health information

The respondents were asked if they were interested in receiving information about the beneficial effects of physical activity on health; they were to indicate the source of information they preferred. As many as 81% expressed their willingness to broaden their knowledge, and the Internet was the most frequently chosen source (Fig. 7).

DISCUSSION

Physical culture fulfils a very important role in human life. Most people are burdened with excessive responsibilities and tremendous stress, which negatively affects the overall functioning of the body. Limiting physical activity leads to serious health consequences and contributes to the development of civilization diseases, including obesity, hypertension, and diabetes.

Paradoxically, an increase in the public awareness of healthy lifestyle and the benefits of regular physical activity can more and more often be seen. There is a rise in the number of people taking care of their health, beauty, and body shape through proper nutrition and physical activity. The breakthrough came when the public began to be inspired by TV stars and celebrities, their silhouette and appearance. An increasing number of sports complexes, including fitness clubs, has also turned out significant. The owners, seeking new customers, attract them with all kinds of promotion and advertising campaigns (Gacek & Chrzanowska, 2011; Sochocka & Wojtyłko, 2013).

A group of 150 people using fitness club services were presented in the paper; 87 (58%) women and 63 (42%) men were interviewed. The youngest study participant was 19, while the oldest was 64 years old. This proves that fitness club activities are taken not only by young people, but also by those of mature age. Early assimilated healthy lifestyle rules accompany people throughout their lives (Marchewka & Jugiewicz, 2008).

The descriptive statistics showed that the average height was 164.56 cm for women and 179.14 cm for men. Large standard deviations were observed in the case of body weight (10.71 among women and 15.23 among men). The respondents included slim people, as well as those suffering from overweight or obesity. Despite an increasing awareness of the positive effects of physical activity, the problem of overweight and obesity in the country affects 50% and 30% of the population, respectively (Kłosiewicz-Latoszek, 2010).

The majority of the respondents (63%) had university education. Only a small percentage (3%) were people with primary education. Higher education was associated with a better professional position and material status. However, the study proved that

not every educated person could afford costly activities. As many as 63% rated their material status as average. The inhabitants of Upper Silesian cities accounted for 73%, while 27% lived in a village.

The majority (68%) of the participants were working people. Out of these, 16% were teachers. It can be assumed that this was due to the fact that teachers do not perform physical work, and their shorter working time allows them to practise physical activity (Baj-Korpak et al., 2010). The participation of retirees or pensioners (9 respondents) in fitness club activities is optimistic.

The reasons for taking physical activity at a fitness club were also explored. Each respondent could mark up to 3 responses. The results showed that the most common motive for starting training was lack of physical activity on a daily basis. Other factors selected by the respondents were: pain in the spine, lack of acceptance for one's appearance, and overweight. People live in a constant hurry. They usually do not care about their own health until they start to have health problems or realize that their weight is too high (Sahaj, 2001).

Next, the type of encouragement to start training in the club was investigated. The study revealed that advertising had the greatest impact on the choice of a place to practise. The quality of services offered and the price of tickets were also important. In the present days, different types of advertisement dominate the world. Even small companies run advertising campaigns to attract as many consumers as possible. They compete in the diversity of advertisement; however, according to the study respondents, the best advertising medium is the Internet – pointed at by as many as 59%. Next, the respondents selected billboards, leaflets, and television advertisements.

The respondents were asked when they had first heard about the existence of fitness clubs. In 79%, it was more than 3 years. In the next question, the participants pointed at how long they had attended a fitness club. In this case, again, the answer in the majority was more than 3 years. One third of the respondents had started their training less than 1 year before. This proves that the fitness trend has recently reached Poland and is now spreading in our country (Merkiel & Ratajczak, 2013).

The survey also involved a question on practising other physical activities than those offered by fitness clubs. Out of the 150 people interviewed, 92 were engaged in additional sports. The most popular were jogging, volleyball, tennis, swimming, cycling, and, increasingly popular, Nordic walking. These participants were able to join additional sport and training in the club. For professional trainers, gym and other fitness classes are often basic elements in preparing for the season. The majority of respondents declared doing extra sport twice a week.

In the next part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked about the frequency of attending fitness clubs. Most trained in the club 1–2 times a week; 3 people trained each day. Many did not train only for achievements or health improvement. Entering the club was a great joy for them and gave them the opportunity to break away from the sad reality. It also allowed for a more frequent contact with other people.

Fitness is a passion and even a lifestyle for some people (Alejziak, 2011). In order for the training to work properly, it should be adjusted to age, health, and stamina. To bring effects, exercise should be done correctly and safely. Beginners should practice under the supervision of a personal trainer (Leśniewska & Stosik, 2016). Unfortunately, only 34% of the respondents decided to cooperate. It is a known fact that the intensity of training should be appropriate for personal physical conditions. The analysis showed that a single training session lasted 1–2 hours in 45% of the respondents.

The study also proved that among the different types of activities offered by fitness clubs, the most popular were gym and group activities. More and more forms of the latter are emerging in the fitness market, the most attractive being aerobics and Pilates. Less popular are the innovative forms of activities such as fit dance, spinning, and Tabata.

Another part of the questionnaire asked how regular training affected the health status of the respondents. Selecting up to 3 responses was allowed. The most popular choices were better mood, weight loss, and improved body image. Physical activity is also bound with many other benefits, such as better physical condition, reduced spinal pain, increased metabolism, improved sleep, and increased body regeneration (Kamelska, 2014). Only 3% of the respondents experienced negative effects of regular physical activity. All these complained about sleep problems.

One of the best ways to fight obesity is regular exercise. Research shows that a 6-month training results in an average weight loss of 1.6 kg (Plewa & Markiewicz, 2006). As many as 88% of the respondents noticed a positive change in their physical activity. The most evident were weight loss, muscle tissue growth, and overall body slimness. Both women and men seek to achieve a perfectly slim figure (Zalewska-Puchała et al., 2015). The majority of respondents (91%) believed that regular physical activity positively influenced their condition and general fitness. Systematic physical activity not only activates all the systems of the human body but also improves the mental state, triggers motivation, and improves the quality of life and mood (Kropiwnicki & Rabe-Jabłońska, 2005; Milka et al., 2011).

Another question was aimed to check the respondents' knowledge about the impact of physical activity on the human body. Among the 10 answers, 6 were true. The participants were asked to mark all that they considered correct. The majority had no doubt that physical activity slowed the aging process, reduced the risk of cardiovascular disease, and accelerated metabolism.

Now the fitness trend has become a fashionable kind of 'addiction'. In the last part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked if they were interested in obtaining health-related information. As many as 81% expressed their willingness to expand their knowledge on this subject. Also, they were asked about the preferred form of providing the information. The Internet was the most commonly chosen method. Many people also preferred talks or lectures on health and the impact of physical activity on the human body.

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the study results, the following conclusions were formulated:

1. The greatest role in encouraging Upper Silesia inhabitants to take up physical activity in fitness clubs was played by advertisements on web sites.
2. The fitness activities most frequently chosen by the study group were gym and group activities. Among the latter, Pilates and aerobics enjoyed the greatest popularity.
3. Regular physical exercise influenced both the well-being and the general health of the respondents, who observed weight loss, body image improvement, and physical fitness.

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STRESZCZENIE

Popularyzacja fitness clubów a aktywność fizyczna mieszkańców Górnego Śląska

Cel badań. Ustalenie związku między popularyzacją fitness clubów a aktywnością fizyczną mieszkańców Górnego Śląska. **Materiał i metody.** Osobom w wieku 19–64 lat rozdano 200 ankiet. Uzyskano 150 wypełnionych ankiet, które poddano dalszej analizie. Kryterium włączenia było aktywne korzystanie z usług fitness clubów na terenie Górnego Śląska i Śląska Cieszyńskiego. Do zebrania danych posłużono się ankietą autorską. **Wyniki i wnioski.** Głównym czynnikiem medialnym wpływającym na popularność fitness clubów okazały się reklamy zamieszczane w sieci, natomiast najpopularniejszymi formami aktywności – siłownia i zajęcia grupowe. Grupę badaną cechowała duża rozpiętość wieku, świadcząca o wzroście zainteresowania aktywnością fizyczną nie tylko osób młodych. Większość respondentów zauważała pozytywny wpływ regularnych ćwiczeń na stan własnego samopoczucia i zdrowia.

Słowa kluczowe: fitness cluby, aktywność ruchowa, styl życia