

Summary

Perception of health risks from lifestyle and work psychic load of teachers from different school levels

Introduction: It is well known that the teaching profession is associated with numerous health risks. Teachers are exposed to excessive mental work and sensory stress, long working in a forced position at increased risk of noise, infections and voice disorders. Compared with the general population, there are more frequently found diseases related to occupational stress.

Aim: To determine the perception of health risks arising from particular health state, lifestyle and workload of teachers from different school levels.

Methods: In the context of cross-sectional epidemiological study we used an anonymous questionnaire enquiry to obtain data from 484 respondents, ranging from 201 primary school teachers, 227 teachers of secondary schools and 56 university teachers. We have investigated the presence of risk factors and their perception by teachers with regard to the school level, age and gender of the respondents. Working psychological stress was assessed by Meister questionnaire.

Results: We found that many respondents were exposed to several risk factors simultaneously. Most often it was a serious illness in close relatives, and increased mental work load. This was increasingly exposed especially among elementary school teachers, for which we diagnosed load level 2 with a tendency to overload. Almost 40% of respondents suffered from chronic diseases, the most frequently from musculoskeletal and/or cardiovascular diseases. Teachers' approach to own health was evaluated on the basis of the prevalence of modifiable risk factors of the lifestyle and participation in preventive examinations. In comparison with the general Czech population teachers showed a lower body weight (24% were overweight and only 6.6% were obese), smoked less (only 12.3%; 7% regularly and 5.3% occasionally), ate fairly regularly (76.5%) and had more physical activity. The participation of our respondents on preventive check-ups was relatively good - on general practitioner's preventive examinations regularly participated 77.5% of the teachers, on dental prevention even 92.1%. Respondents were aware of their risks quite well, which was mainly reflected in the fear of possible future health consequences. Certain underestimation of risk occurred only in smokers.

Conclusion: In comparison with data from the nineties of the last century we can observe in our teachers positive changes in the approach to own health, especially the decrease of health risk factors prevalence and increase participation in preventive examinations. Of all the health risks to which teachers in our schools are exposed to, high psychological job stress for teachers of primary schools we consider as the most serious one. Preventive programs should be aimed mainly in this direction.