

A SURVEY OF OPINIONS OF STUDENTS INVOLVED IN ATHLETICS REGARDING EXTRACURRICULAR SPORTS ACTIVITIES, AND A STUDY OF HEALTHY LIFESTYLE HABITS

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Abstract: Athletics is a sport that gets children and young people moving. The power of athletics is to inspire children to be more active, develop their skills and confidence, and connect with sport for life. Athletics provides an opportunity for children to develop a wide range of skills. Children learn discipline, perseverance and the value of hard work. They develop problem-solving abilities, strategic thinking, and decision-making skills as they face challenges during training and competition. Track and field encourages time management and goal-setting skills as athletes must balance their training, schoolwork, and other commitments. These skills, acquired through sports, can have a positively impact a child's academic performance and future endeavors. Participating in athletics significantly boosts a child's self-esteem. As children improve their skills and witness their progress, they gain a sense of accomplishment and develop confidence in their abilities. The successes and failures experienced in sports teach children how to deal with both victory and defeat, instilling resilience and perseverance. Regular physical activity has a positive effect on symptoms of anxiety and depression in children. Exercise stimulates the release of endorphins and serotonin in the brain, which help regulate mood and promote a sense of well-being. For children who may be struggling with feelings of sadness, anxiety, or low self-esteem, playing sports can be a natural and effective way to improve their mental state. The purpose of our study is to examine students' opinions about extracurricular athletics activities and to determine whether they lead a healthy lifestyle. To conduct the study, we used a survey of students aged between 13 and 16 years who participated in, athletics as an extracurricular activity. The analysis of the results shows that over 95% of the surveyed athletes are convinced that physical activity and sport contribute to their good health. Based on the research conducted, we can conclude that a positive attitude towards sports has a beneficial effect on the health and professional fulfillment of the individuals studied.

Keywords: athletics, students, survey, opinion, healthy lifestyle

1. INTRODUCTION

Regular participation in athletics contributes significantly to a child's physical fitness and health. Sporting activities provide opportunities for exercise and movement, helping children develop motor skills, coordination, and agility. Participating in physical activities such as running, jumping, and throwing improves cardiovascular endurance and strengthens muscles and bones. Participating in sports provides a natural way to relieve stress. Physical activity increases the production of endorphins, which can help reduce feelings of stress and anxiety. Playing sports allows children to focus on the activity rather than their worries, providing them with a mental break from the pressures of everyday life. The stability that sports offer can help children develop discipline and a sense of routine, which can be essential for mental health. The commitment required to attend practices, stick to training schedules, and work toward specific goals teaches children dedication and perseverance. Learning the value of hard work and perseverance helps children understand that effort leads to results—a lesson that applies to many aspects of their lives.

Regular physical activity also directly impacts sleep quality. Active children who are active are often able to sleep better at night. Good sleep helps regulate mood, improve concentration, and reduce anxiety, creating a solid foundation for mental stability for many years to come.

In recent years, however, there has been a decrease in students physical activity across all ages. According to Z. Georgiev, "The issue of the health of children and young people, increasing their physical activity and overcoming low motor activity is increasingly relevant in Bulgarian society. One of the main reasons for low physical performance is the lack of exercise habits (Georgiev 2020).

In addition to children's participation in the learning and training process, sports foster a healthy lifestyle and encourage children to maintain regular exercise routines and make smart choices regarding nutrition and rest.

L. Kasabova adds that "In modern life, in addition to targeted activities in a specific sport, it is necessary for children who play sports to be given knowledge about how to lead a healthy lifestyle, how to build their optimal diet so that their body receives all the necessary nutrients through food." (Kasabova 2022)

According to M. Shishkov, "Sports activities in combination with an optimal diet lead to improved health, working capacity and functional capabilities, to better self-esteem, hardening of the will, increasing the body's resistance to

stressful situations and various diseases, for faster adaptation to constantly changing conditions, which in turn helps to achieve greater efficiency in all areas of life. "(Shishkov 2021)

2. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of our research is to explore students' opinions about extracurricular athletics activities, as well as to determine whether they lead a healthy lifestyle.

To achieve this goal, we set the following tasks:

- To develop a questionnaire
- To conduct an anonymous survey among students using the prepared questionnaire.
- To study the opinion of students regarding extracurricular athletics activities.
- To process and analyze the data from the survey.
- To draw up current conclusions and recommendations

3. METHODOLOGY

To achieve the set goals and objectives set, we applied the following methods: specialized literature research, survey method, mathematical and statistical methods.

The subject of the study is the knowledge and needs of the surveyed students regarding extracurricular athletics activities.

The survey contingent consists of 163 students in track and field athletics who attend classes at V. Levski Stadium, Sofia.

The study was conducted through a survey of students in athletics as an extracurricular form of education. The study was conducted in April 2024. 163 athletes aged 13-16 years participated in it /121 females and 42 males/.

The questionnaire is anonymous and contains 15 questions. Each question contains between 3 and 5 sub-questions concerning the issues of interest to us. It is conventionally divided into two parts – questions related to sports activities (questions 1-10) and questions related to a healthy lifestyle (questions 11-15).

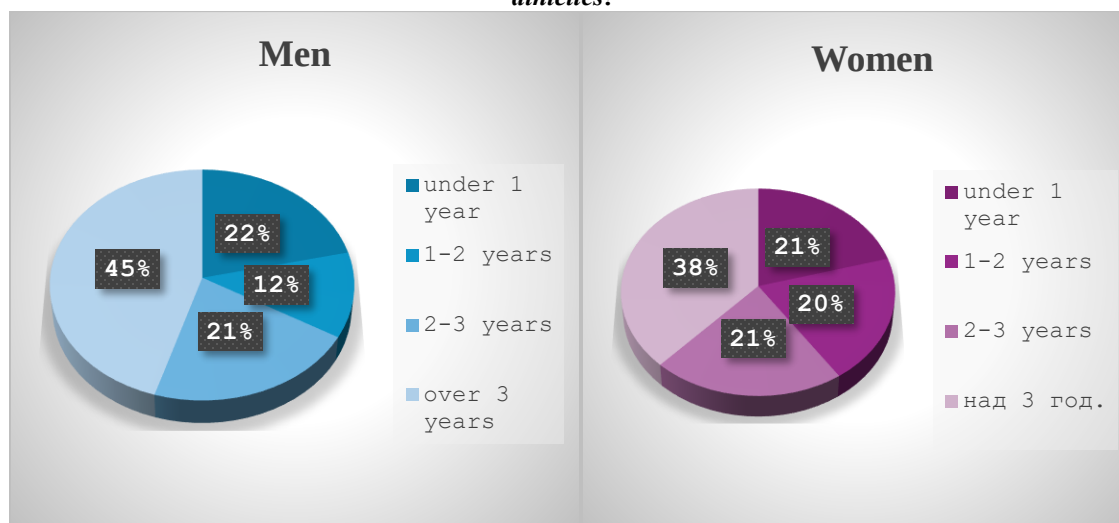
The data from the survey were subjected to mathematical and statistical processing. The results of the study were processed in Excel with frequency analysis using a one-dimensional frequency distribution.

4. RESULTS ANALYSIS

When analyzing the results, the survey responses were followed in sequence.

To the question: *"How long have you been involved in athletics?"* /Fig.1 and Fig.2/ 45% of boys and 38% of girls answer that they have been involved in organized athletics for more than three years. The percentage of students who have been training for 1 to 3 years is almost the same: 20 - 22%. 21% of female athletes and 22% of male athletes have been training for less than 1 year.

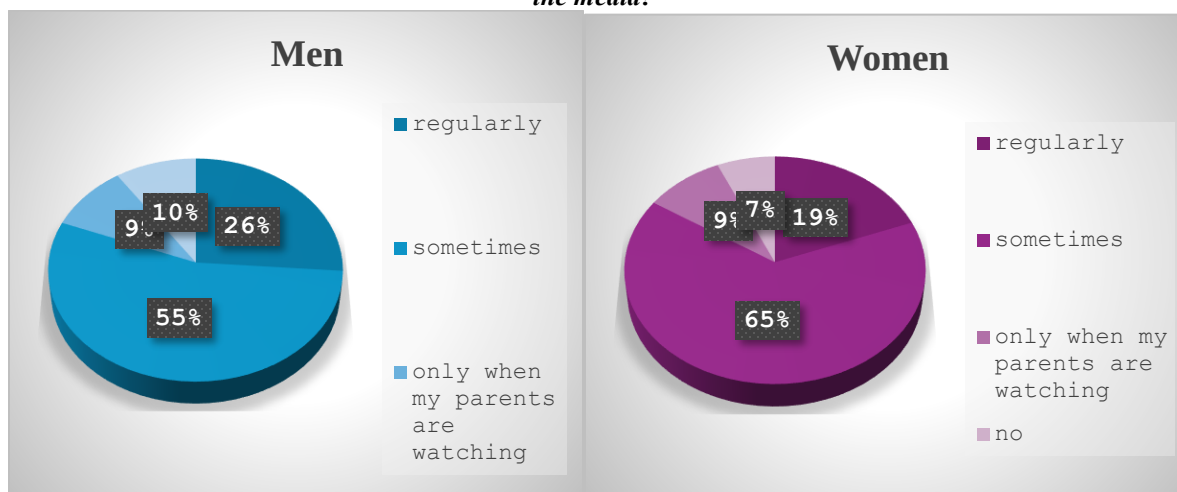
Figure 1 and Fig.2. Percentage distribution of answers to the question: "How long have you been involved in athletics?"



Source: author research

When answering the question: *"Do you follow sports broadcasts on the media?"* /Fig.3 and Fig.4/ Over 55% of the surveyed athletes answered that they only sometimes follow sports competitions in the media. 26% of boys and 19% of girls regularly watch sports on television. 9% of the surveyed athletes watch sports broadcasts only when their parents watch sports competitions. Less than 10% of the surveyed do not watch sports broadcasts on television.

Figure 3 and Fig.4. The percentage distribution of answers to the question: "Do you follow sports broadcasts on the media?"

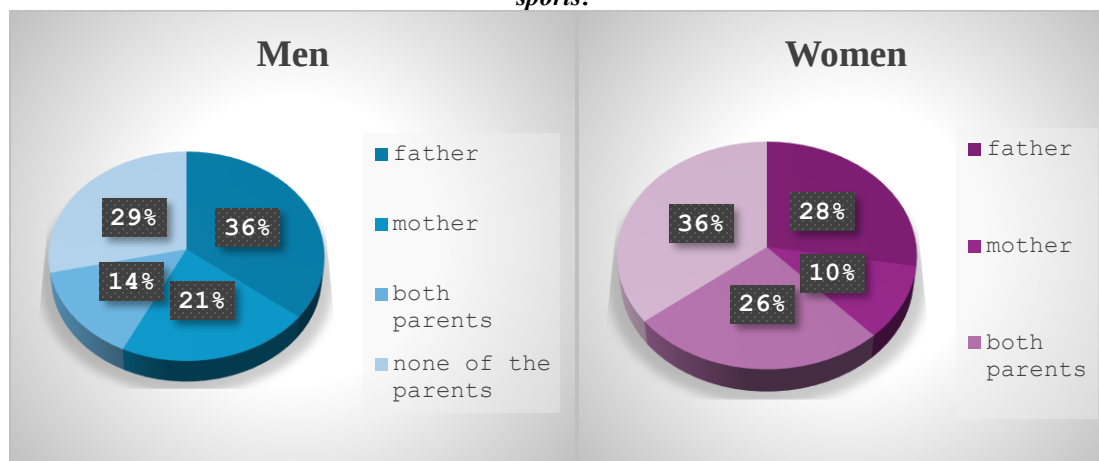


Source: author research

To the question: *"What is your parents' attitude towards sports?"* 97% of the surveyed athletes answered that their parents' attitude towards sports is positive. Only 3% answered that they have no opinion on this issue. The family environment makes a specific contribution to the development of an interest in physical exercise and sports.

To the question: *"Which of your parents does sports?"* /Fig.5 and Fig.6/ The positive attitude of parents towards sports is observed in the answers to this question from the survey, where in total about 70% at least one or both of the parents do sports. Unfortunately, for about 30% of the surveyed athletes, neither of their parents does sports.

Figure 5 and Fig.6. The percentage distribution of answers to the question: "Which of your parents is involved in sports?"

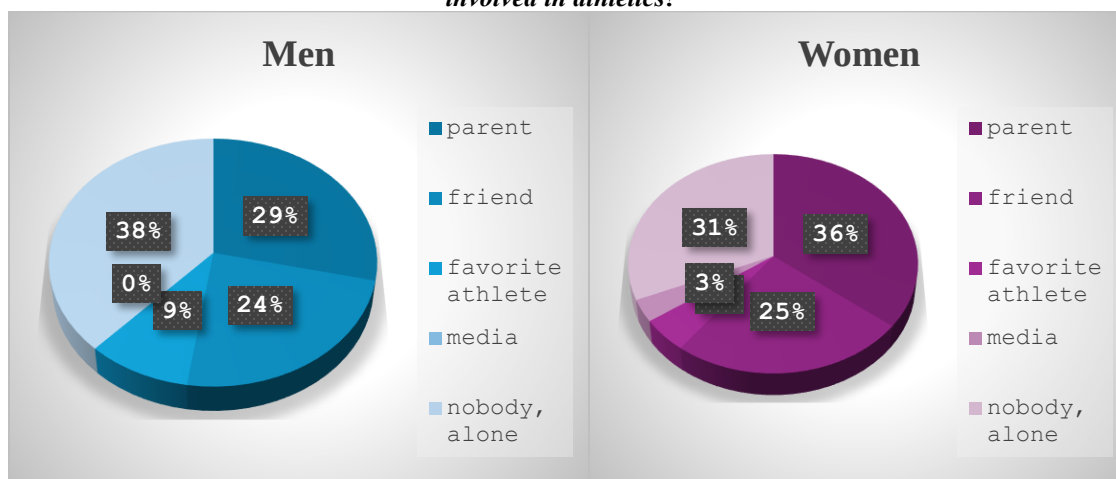


Source: author research

The positive example set by parents is also observed in the answers to the question: *"Who or what inspired you to get involved in athletics?"* /Fig.7 and Fig.8/ 36% of girls and 29% of boys share that their parents are the people who inspired and supported them to get involved in athletics. 25% of the surveyed athletes /boys and girls/ say that a

friend motivated them to play sports. Less than 9% of the surveyed athletes were motivated by a favorite athlete. 31% of the girls and 38% of the boys decided to do athletics on their own.

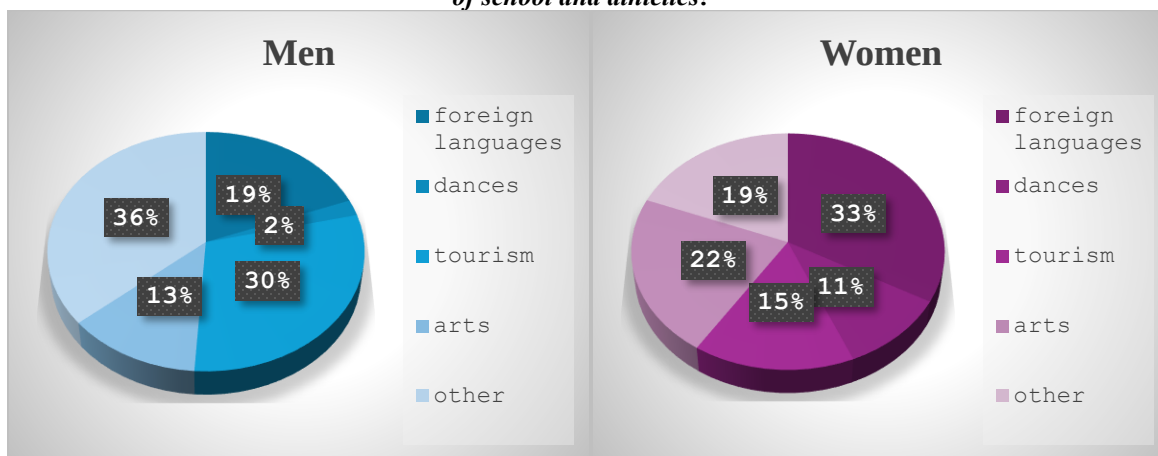
Figure 7 and Fig.8. The percentage distribution of answers to the question: "Who or what inspired you to get involved in athletics?"



Source: author research

To the question: *"What interests do you have outside of school and athletics?"* /Fig.9 and Fig.10/ This question allows more than one answer. 33% of girls and 19% of adolescents have chosen foreign language courses as additional activities. Tourism is preferred by 30% of boys and 15% of girls. Dance classes are preferred by a very small percentage of surveyed athletes /11% women and 2% men/. Arts as additional activities are preferred by 22% of girls and 13% of adolescents. In the "other" column /36% boys and 19% girls/, respondents indicate the following extracurricular activities: volleyball, swimming, basketball, fitness, as well as Bulgarian language and mathematics courses.

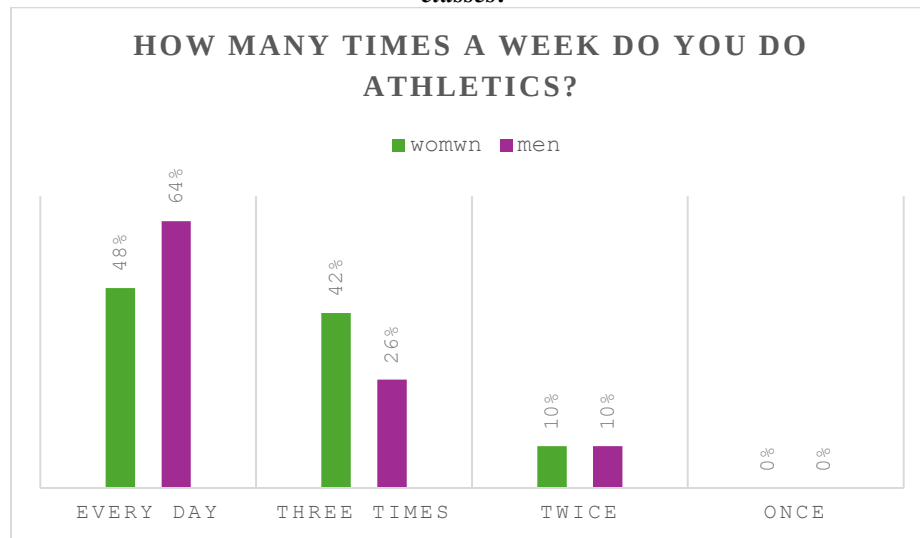
Figure 9 and Fig.10. The percentage distribution of answers to the question: "What interests do you have outside of school and athletics?"



Source: author research

To the question: *"How many times a week do you conduct athletics classes?"* Fig.11 shows that 64% of the surveyed adolescents and 48% of the surveyed girls manage to conduct more than 4 classes per week, which is a very good indicator of the development of their sports form. Only 10% of girls and boys train twice a week.

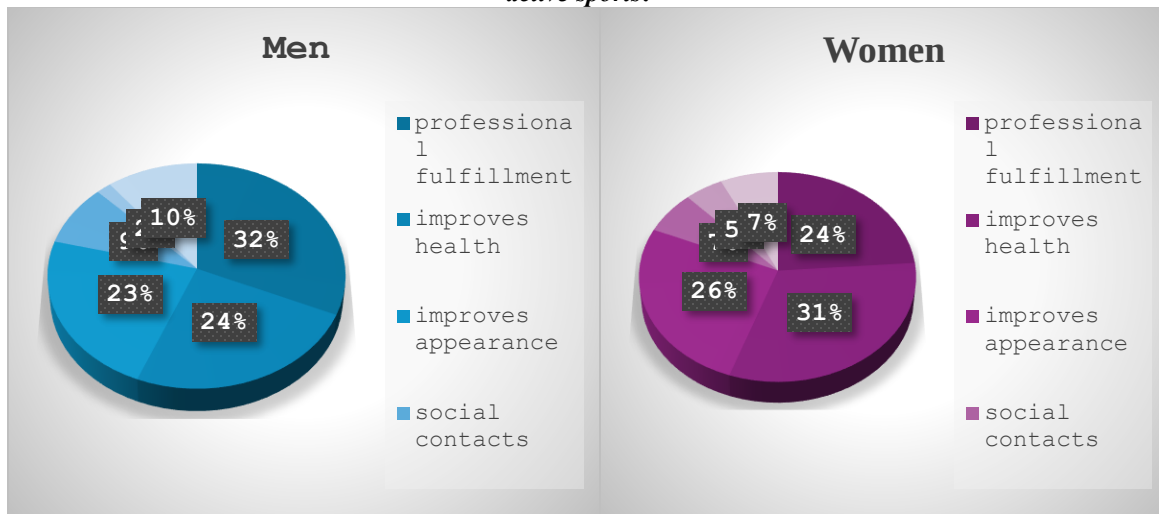
Figure 11. Percentage distribution of answers to the question: "How many times a week do you conduct athletics classes?"



Source: author research

To the question: *"What sparks your interest in active sports?"* Approximately one-third of the boys surveyed choose to pursue a career in professional sports, while only 24% of the girls seek professional fulfillment. 31% of women and 24% of men respond that sports improve their health. It is striking that respondents of both sexes report the same percentage and affirm that sports help them make new social contacts. Accordingly, 5% of women and 2% of men answer that active sports increase their working capacity. /Fig.12 and Fig.13/

Figure 12 and Fig.13. The percentage distribution of answers to the question: "What arouses your interest in active sports?"



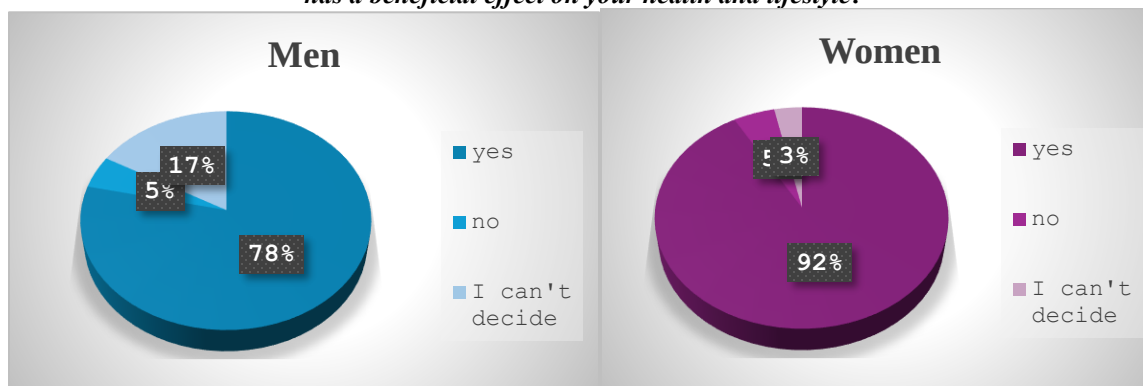
Source: author research

To the question: *"Are you convinced that physical activity is beneficial for a person's health?"* Thanks to regular running, bones become stronger and their resilience and strength are maintained. Running is a great way to improve mental and physical health. 95% of male and 97% of female athletes believe that physical activity and sports contribute to children's good health.

To the question: *"Do you believe that a healthy diet has a beneficial effect on your health and lifestyle?"* A balanced diet is the foundation of a healthy lifestyle. It includes consuming a variety of foods rich in essential nutrients, vitamins, and minerals. 78% of the surveyed adolescents and 92% of the girls answered categorically that

healthy eating has a positive impact on their lifestyle and full-fledged training activity. 17% of the boys and 3% of the girls answered "I can't say". /Fig.14 and Fig.15/

Figure 14 and Fig.15. Percentage distribution of responses to the question: "Do you believe that healthy eating has a beneficial effect on your health and lifestyle?"



Source: author research

To the question: "Do you eat healthily and do you think that your diet provides the body with the necessary nutrients?" /Table 1/ To this question, 74% of female athletes and 63% of male athletes answered that they eat healthily to some extent. At least one of their meals is healthy. In total, about 27% of the respondents do not eat properly for athletes. The same percentage, 5%, consume foods containing more salt. The competitors who consume foods with more sugar are: 16% of boys and 10% of girls.

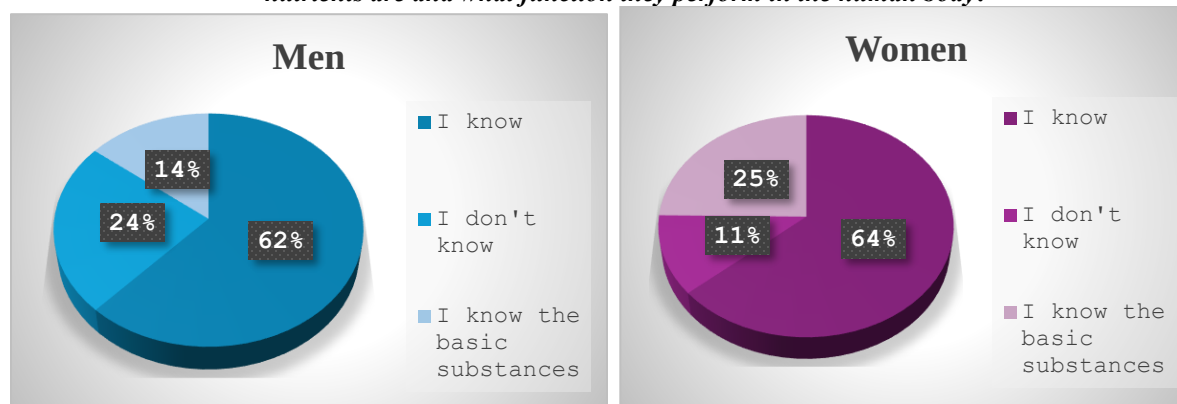
Table 1. Percentage distribution of answers to the question: "Do you eat healthily and do you think that your diet provides the body with the necessary nutrients?"

	Yes, in parts	no	I take more salt	I take more sugar
Women	74%	11%	5%	10%
Men	63%	16%	5%	16%

Source: author research

The answers and comparative analysis of the question: "Do you know what the main nutrients are and what function they perform in the human body?" /Fig.16 and Fig.17/ The number of positive answers to this question is 62% among the male athletes surveyed and 64% among the female athletes. 24% of boys and 11% of girls gave a negative answer. The answer "I know the main substances, but I am not familiar with their functions" was preferred by 14% of adolescents and 25% of girls.

Figure 16 and Fig.17. The percentage distribution of answers to the question: "Do you know what the main nutrients are and what function they perform in the human body?"



Source: author research

In the responses to the question: *"Do you follow a special diet?"*, 81% of male athletes and 35% of female athletes gave a positive answer. Accordingly, 19% of adolescents and 65% of girls do not follow a diet

5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results obtained, the following conclusions can be drawn.

- A large percentage of the boys and girls surveyed have a positive attitude towards sports. We accept the involvement of at least one parent in sports as a positive example for their children and a way to encourage the younger generation to adopt an active lifestyle.
- The interests of the surveyed individuals at this age are also indicative: foreign languages, dances, tourism, arts and others.
- The surveyed athletes believe that sports activities play a serious role in improving their health, improving their body and improving their appearance.

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