Case Study on tackling health inequalities at the Olomouc Region level

Work Package 5: “Regions”

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Part I: Setting the scene

According to the risk of poverty, income distribution and education attainment the Czech Republic is one of the most equal country within the EU region. (Eurostat, 2010)

There are not any significant Health Inequalities in the Olomouc Region and that is why we try to aim our activities at all the people.

In the Olomouc Region, like in other regions in the Czech Republic, politicians are chosen in elections for a four-year period and usually have their own aims, ideas and priorities about what needs to be done. Their priorities are usually divided into 11 sectors of interest such as health, social care, environment, transport and others. The health sector comprises mostly of secondary and tertiary prevention. In the Olomouc Region, the health policy is primarily focused on health care delivery system and the development of medical devices such as reconstruction of buildings or new instrumentation for hospitals. Politicians are aware of the fact that the issue of Health Inequalities (HI) should be addressed directly. But this issue is not considered to be important and attractive in the Olomouc Region because there are not any significant Health Inequalities. Tackling Health Inequalities is not on the agenda of regional politicians. Olomouc politicians support mainly sports, culture and transport.

Every year it is possible to obtain money from the Olomouc Region. The Olomouc Region funds projects up to 30 000 CZK (1 200 €) or major projects (the amount of money is unlimited, but must be higher than 30 000 CZK /1 200 €).

It is possible to apply for money in these areas:

1. Education and science
2. Youth
3. Culture
4. Sports
5. Drug addiction
6. Health
7. Social services
8. Tourism
9. Environment

Projects should be beneficial for both the Olomouc Region and its people. On one hand, employees of the Olomouc Regional Authority should make comments on the project, but on the other hand, their comments are rarely respected. Only the regional politicians decide about supporting and funding of projects. Unfortunately, there is no independent expert committee that recommends or rejects the funding of a project.

In 2010 the Olomouc Region spent 62 000 000 CZK (2.5 million €) on projects. Money distribution is represented in the following graphs.
Graph 1: Distribution of money for major projects from 2008 to 2010 (in €)

Graph 2: Distribution of money for 1200 € project from 2008 to 2010 (in €)
Health policy should be influenced by the health indicators of the Olomouc Region and the health problems should be solved according to these indicators. Tackling HI and health policy should be on the agenda of regional politicians, but it is not. Even more, there is no fund aimed at preventing health problems or HI in the Olomouc Region.

Since 2002 there has been Health 21 (the National Public Health Strategy) in the Czech Republic. According to the Czech legislation regions should accept Health 21 and should make an effort to realize and support it in their regions. But nowhere is written how and which way. It depends on the regions how it will be managed. Olomouc Region has accepted Health 21 since 2004.

In 2007 the Public Health Authority of the Olomouc Region processed a large health analysis of the inhabitants of the Olomouc Region. According to this analysis a concept of an effective health policy of the Olomouc Region was suggested. Both documents were introduced to the Olomouc Region but they were not accepted. Regional politicians refused to prevent people living in the Olomouc Region from health problems. For these politicians it was not considered to be important and interesting. Moreover, the politicians do not require any information and reports about health in the Olomouc Region.

Only because of the initiative of the Olomouc Region assistants (assistants of the Regional Department of Health), a few primary prevention projects can be funded in the Olomouc Region every year. These assistants are able to support projects related to Health 21 Programme, such as prevention of sexually transmitted diseases project, childhood obesity or the prevention of bad posture projects. But the financial contributions are low (approximately 100 000 CZK/4 000 € a year).

The only exceptions are an area of drug policy and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). An established governmental link exists and, according to Czech legislation, the Olomouc Region has to pay attention to these areas. Unfortunately, there is no legislative duty to tackle HI in the regions and a national linking level through the regional to local levels for the HI area is missing.

Possible solutions:
- incorporate HI into the national legislative documents. (According to these documents, it would be a duty to handle HI in regions)
- increase the number of professional who would address HI in regions
- address HI from a multi-stakeholders perspective (not just from the Regional Department of Health); direct participation of more sectors is necessary

Stakeholders

The main stakeholders involved in HI in the Olomouc Region are the Public Health Authority of the Olomouc Region and Palacký University in Olomouc.

In 2003 there were significant changes in the public health authority level. Until 2003, all of the primary prevention areas were managed by the Regional Health Authorities in regions. Everything has changed since 2003. Public Health Authorities could not do any prevention activities, and for this purpose the Regional Institutes of Public Health were established. Though, they were cancelled in 2008. Since that time, there has been no institute concerning the primary prevention or dealing with HI. The Public Health Authority of the Olomouc
Region has been voluntarily providing primary prevention activities since 2003. From 2004, the Public Health Authority has been making an effort to create and implement an effective health policy in the Olomouc Region and to create a specific grant system related to the Health 21 programme. Since 2007, Palacký University (Faculty of Education) has been helping to deal with HI in several projects.
PART II. Practice

1. Game against STDs & AIDS in the Olomouc Region

Introduction:

HIV/AIDS is a public health problem due to the complex emotional, behavioural and psychological complications associated with it. Since there is no complete cure or an effective vaccine to prevent HIV/AIDS, awareness and appropriate knowledge play an important role in preventing the further spread of HIV/AIDS among the general population.

Sexually transmitted diseases are considered to be quite a problem especially among young people.

Chlamydia is the most frequently reported STD in Europe. In the EU three quarters (75 %) of all Chlamydia cases, 44 % of all gonorrhoea cases and almost one fifth of all syphilis cases were reported in young people between 15 and 24 years of age in 2009. In the Czech Republic there were 23 % of all syphilis cases and 41 % of all gonorrhoea cases reported in young people between 15 and 24 years of age in 2009.

Eleven percent of all HIV infections were diagnosed in European people between 15 and 24 years of age in 2010 while in the Czech Republic it was nearly 16 %.

According to the National Institute of Public Health survey from the year 1986 to 2011, nearly 22 % of all HIV infections were diagnosed in young people between 15 and 24 years of age in the Czech Republic.

There are more syphilis and HIV cases among young people in the Czech Republic than the average for EU. It was the reason to start this primary prevention project in the Olomouc Region.

What is more, there was a study conducted in the Olomouc Region in 2010. The aim of this study was to explore primary school students’ attitudes in the Olomouc Region and their knowledge about HIV/AIDS.

According to the study, there are some misunderstandings among students. For example, only a few of them knew (4.9 %) that breast feeding can transmit HIV infection. Only 10.5 % are aware of the fact that it is necessary to wait for at least 2 months to get a reliable result of an HIV antibody blood test (Graph 1). Nearly 20 % think that there is a vaccine to prevent HIV infection.
Graph 1: When would you undergo an HIV antibody blood test?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When would you undergo an HIV antibody blood test?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>immediately after a risky situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a week after a risky situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a month after a risky situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two or three months after a risky situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anytime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About the project 'Game against STDs & AIDS in the Olomouc Region'

Photo 1: During the project

Photo: Martin Hlavica
Time frame: 2010 – 2011

Target group: Olomouc region lower secondary school students at the age of 13, 14 and 15

Involved partners:

The Olomouc Region;
The Public Health Authority of the Olomouc Region;
Palacký University Olomouc, Faculty of Education, Department of Anthropology and Health Education;
The National Institute of Public Health.

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'Game against STD & AIDS' is a set of aims, ideas and activities that promotes awareness of the importance of the field of sexually transmitted diseases. It is an interactive HIV/AIDS primary prevention project. The aim of the project is to inform adolescents about HIV/AIDS in a non-traditional way throughout the game. Students acquire basic knowledge about transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections during the project. They also learn how to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancy. The project helps students to think about their own attitudes and behaviour towards potential risky situations. The game is well designed to influence and change the way young people think about sexually transmitted diseases.
The Czech project was created in 1998 and was inspired by a German project called 'Mitmach-Parcours zu AIDS, Liebe und Sexualität'. The National Institute of Public Health is in charge of the project in the Czech Republic and has all rights reserved. Regional Public Health Authorities are allowed to borrow the project from NIPH and implement it in their regions.

How does the project work?

Students are divided into five smaller groups (one group could consist of up to 15 people, but smaller groups usually yield better results). The minimum amount of students for one group is five. There are five different stations in the project and each group has to complete each task in 15 minutes. Each station has its own lecturer who scores the group according to their knowledge, activity and spontaneity. The group with the highest score wins and all the members of the group receive a prize.

Stations:

Station 1 – ways of transmission

The aim of this station is to inform the students about the ways HIV and other STDs are transmitted. Students are shown 15 pictures of several situations. Students then have to attach the right colour on each picture. The colour red indicates the situation that usually leads to an HIV or STD infection. The colour yellow indicates situations that can lead to an HIV infection, but are not as risky as red situations. The colour green indicates a less risky situation. Afterwards, the lecturer discusses all the situations in the pictures with the students.

Station 2 – Love, sexuality and prevention

The purpose of this station is to speak about love, partnership, marriage, parenthood, faithfulness & unfaithfulness, people you can always rely on, etc.

Photo 2: Lecturers and students at station 2
Station 3 – How people can protect themselves against sexually transmitted diseases and avoid unexpected pregnancy.

The lecturer explains various types of contraceptive methods and highlights methods which can protect against STDs.

Station 4 – Miming

This station is for relaxing and cheering up. Students have to perform different funny situations connected with being in love, being jealous, dating, etc.

Station 5 – Life with HIV or STD

Students learn about STDs and try to create a story about a person who was infected by an STD, how it could have happened, what the symptoms were and whether the disease is curable.

The project is challenging because at least five trained lecturers are needed for one turn. There were students from the Faculty of Education from Palacký University trained as lecturers. In 2010 and 2011 about 200 students participated there as lecturers.
Since 2010, over 2000 pupils from approximately 50 lower secondary schools in the Olomouc Region participated in the project. It took place at the Public Health Authority and was free of charge.

**Costs and outcomes:**

Total costs were 10 000 CZK (400 €) in 2010 and 100 000 CZK (4000 €) in 2011. All the money for this project was given by the Olomouc Region.

In 2010 the money was spent on transport of equipment needed for the project from Prague to Olomouc and back.

The project was a huge success in 2010. Everybody who took part in the project was excited and thrilled. Since 2010, many schools, teachers and students have been calling for more participation in such useful and amazing projects. Because of the success in 2010, the project was given more money by the Olomouc Region in 2011. Besides transport, the money was spent on preventive posters and leaflets in 2011.

**Conclusion:**

Concerning primary prevention – it is necessary to meet young people face to face, let them ask questions that interest them, answer all their questions and explain common misunderstandings and mistakes.
Despite the fact that there is not the highest level of STDs or abortions in the Czech Republic compared with other countries, it is still necessary to continue speaking about crucial problems of sexual education with young people in order to minimize the future increase of STDs.

**Needs and gaps**

Despite the fact that we are able to realize quite a big project for minimal costs, it is hard to say with certainty if we will obtain the needed funds from the Olomouc Region for the project in 2012 as well.

The reasons are:

- primary prevention is underestimated in the Olomouc Region
- there is just one person to deal with health policy and HI in the entire region
- there is not enough money for health policy and HI from Olomouc region
- there are many topics and problems of public health to deal with

These projects could be funded via Structural Funds, but there is no interest from the Olomouc Region.

**References:**


2. 'Healthy Back' in the Olomouc Region

Introduction:

There is an increasing incidence of defective posture not only in the Czech Republic but also in Europe. It affects all age groups of the population, but the highest incidence is among young children. While other European countries do not deal with this problem and do not consider this fact to be serious, our region is unique and makes an effort to solve it.

Fifty to sixty percent of young children suffer from defective posture. This is a serious problem because if it is not detected and remedied in their youth, it will lead to backaches and medical treatments in their adulthood.

Parents typically are not able to assess the posture of their children in an adequate way and often do not pay sufficient attention to this problem.

About 'Healthy Back' project:


Target group: Primary school students in the Olomouc Region at the age of 6, 7, 8 and 9

Involved partners:

Palacký University in Olomouc, Faculty of Education, Department of Anthropology and Health Education; Public Health Authority of the Olomouc Region

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The aim of the project:

The aim of the project is to decrease the amount of young children with bad posture by doing exercises with large, exercise balls.
The project is focused on children with defective postures and using exercises with a ball leading to the correction of their defective posture. The project enables exercise balls to be purchased for children from the poor families. The project also provides professional training of teachers who exercise with children at school. Teachers get to know valuable information on how to exercise with the ball as well as how to train children in a healthy way.

Photo 2: Professional training of teachers
Exercising with an exercise ball reduces the incidence of a child’s poor posture.

Methods:

There is a long-term preventive intervention in the Olomouc Region provided by the Department of Anthropology and Health Education and Public Health Authority of the Olomouc Region. During this intervention there is regularly, approximately twice a year, tested the somatic development and bad posture among primary school children. The same parameters are measured among all children who do exercises with the exercise ball during their educational process at school. These children regularly alternate static and dynamic seating on the ball and do other ball exercises during their school time.

The evaluation of a child’s somatic status is carried out according to the standardized anthropometric methodology. The posture is assessed according to the special method of inspection which focuses on six areas of the body.

Photo 3: During the research

Children are classified according to the measurement results into relevant categories.

The children enrolled in category III (defective posture), and category IV (very defective posture), are recommended to visit an orthopaedist. Teachers notify the parents about this recommendation.

The project has been implemented in the Olomouc Region since 2005. Over 600 primary school children have participated in the project. These children are aged between six and nine years of age.

Results:

The results show that children’s posture is positively influenced by a regular exercise with a ball.

There is a difference in the results of children who were doing the exercise and children who were not. The posture did not improve among the children who did not do any exercise with the exercise ball at school. Additionally, there was worse posture found than at the beginning of the project among some children who did not do any exercises with the exercise ball at school.
Exercise with an exercise ball positively influences the pelvic area, curve back and frontal plane.

At the beginning of the project there were 57.3 % placed in the category of defective posture and 41.6 % in the category of nearly perfect posture. Then the children started to exercise with the exercise balls at school. At the end of the research, the results showed that there were only 37.1 % of children enrolled in the category of defective posture while 59.6 % were enrolled in the category of nearly perfect posture.

Photo 5: Children with exercise balls

**Costs and gaps:**

The project was funded by the Olomouc Region in the years 2008 and 2009. The amount of money given by the Olomouc Region was about 135 500 CZK (5420 €) in 2009 and 10 000 CZK (400 €) in 2008. In 2009 the money was spent on buying the exercise balls for children, equipment for research and for a workshop for teachers. In 2008 the money was spent only on the workshop for teachers.

In other years the project was funded just by the Department of Anthropology and Health Education. Nowadays, there is not enough money at the department because the budget of the department is decreasing every year. It seems that the project will probably not be able to continue.

The project has not been funded via Structural Funds. There are just a few people at the Department of Anthropology and Health Education and these people do not have enough time to deal with other Structural Funds projects. It would be better if the project would be funded by the Olomouc Region itself and its specific grant system which is related to Health 21.

**Conclusion:**

It was proven that exercising with exercise balls at school can lead to better posture in children. Not only the posture of children was positively influenced by the exercise with a ball, but it also was good that children could have a rest and relax during their educational process. Using exercise balls as an alternative seating did not affect their lessons.

When we pay enough attention to the posture of children, we can help them avoid having problems with their back in adulthood.

The easiest way how to protect people from backache is just to get them used to doing exercise during their childhood.

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