Leisure Time & Risk Sexual Behaviour - Croatian adolescents' perspective

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The project ‘Quality of leisure time as a protective factor for the development of behavioural problems’ aims to investigate the influence of structured leisure time on mitigating adolescents’ involvement in risk behaviours. Leisure can be a powerful context for positive youth development, but it can also be a context for youth engagement in risk behaviours. Therefore, the research question is: How does participation in structured leisure time activities influence risk sexual behaviour from the perspective of Croatian high school students? The sample consists of a total population of high school students from one county in Croatia (2,977 students, from 9 high schools). The age of the participants ranged from 14 to 20 years (51% female). The following questionnaires were used: (1) Adolescent Leisure Time Questionnaire; (2) Youth Experience Survey; (3) Risk Sexual Behaviour of Adolescents Questionnaire. Preliminary data show that 57% of adolescents currently participate in structured leisure activities. Before the pandemic COVID 19, 23% of adolescents participated in structured leisure activities twice a week, while during the pandemic COVID 19, only 15% did. Moreover, 35% of adolescents did not participate in structured leisure activities during the pandemic because they were anxious. Regarding risk sexual behaviours, 29% of adolescents had sexual intercourse, and of those 16% reported having experienced it before the age of 14. Unprotected sexual intercourse in the past 6 months under the influence of alcohol was reported by 15%, and under the influence of cannabis by 6% of adolescents. In presenting this work, the influence of structured leisure time activities on adolescents’ risk sexual behaviour will be emphasized. The broader perspective and understanding of adolescents’ leisure time and how it influences adolescent’s behaviour and/or developmental outcomes is important for planning evidence-based strategies and interventions in the field of prevention science.

Key messages:
• The findings of this study can be an important resource for evidence-based intervention planning aimed at promoting positive youth development/prevention of youth risk behaviours.
• It is important to focus on creating opportunities in the community for quality leisure time use and educating key stakeholders about the importance of investing in quality leisure for youth.