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Polish pupils from the Alpha generation and their lifestyle

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Abstract

The present study explores the emerging interest in the phenomenon of the Alpha generation, a subject on which there is a paucity of both theoretical and empirical works. To date, there has been no organised attempt to synthesise the extant knowledge on the lifestyles of today's

youngest generation of students from different countries worldwide. The present paper thus aims to address this knowledge gap by presenting a concise overview of the lifestyles of Polish students of the Alpha generation. The paper addresses the main factors shaping health in this age group by referring to diet and eating habits, mental health, physical activity, and sleeping, with particular attention given to problems resulting from excessive use of digital media and minimising physical activity. It was concluded that, in Polish schools, for the sustainable development of students of the Alpha generation, there is a need to introduce health education and close intersectoral cooperation.

Keywords: elementary schools, generation Alpha, pedagogy, Polish education, psychology

Introduction

The term ‘Generation Alpha’ refers to those born since 2011, who, as a new demographic cohort, are distinguished by their profound connection to technology and the digital world. This influence is evident in their unique learning styles, social relationships, and cognitive development (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009). However, this strong bond with technology is accompanied by challenges in the realm of social relationship building and maintenance (Piepiora & Kalina, 2023). Furthermore, the early childhood of the Alpha generation has been associated with significant global crises, including climate change and the ongoing pandemic of the SARS-CoV-2 virus (Hidayat et al., 2024). These crises have had, and will continue to have, a profound impact on the values and social priorities of the Alpha generation (McCrindle & Fell, 2020). It is therefore vital to emphasise the necessity for support from families and educational institutions in ensuring the optimal psychosomatic development of the Alpha generation.

Generation Alpha has been observed to demonstrate certain challenges in the domain of social communication when compared to Generation Z. Research indicates a propensity to work independently rather than in collaborative groups (McCrindle, 2021). There is also an evident inclination towards egocentrism and a heightened reliance on technology (Apaydin & Kaya, 2020). The Alpha generation’s strong aptitude for adapting to digital tools is associated with the necessity for enhanced integration of contemporary technologies in educational processes (Garaigordobil, 2023). Consequently, the necessity to adapt teaching methodologies

to the distinct requirements of the Alpha generation, thereby leveraging their strengths, is emphasised in primary schools. Additionally, it is noteworthy that students from the Alpha generation encounter challenges in interpreting body language and emotions exhibited by their peers, which is associated with diminished interpersonal skills (Flavian, 2024). Consequently, the effective integration of modern technology in the educational curriculum can serve as a facilitator for the Alpha generation to master collaborative group activities and enhance communication skills among students. This assertion is further substantiated by the findings of Höfrová et al. (2024), who observed that modern technologies play a pivotal role in facilitating classroom integration for students with special educational needs.

The impact of technology on the lifestyles and health choices of the Alpha generation is a significant issue that merits attention. The quality of life for any individual is linked to a healthy lifestyle, which consists of physical, mental and social health components (Waszkiewicz & Bąk, 2024). Engaging in regular physical activity is emphasised as a means of enhancing physical fitness, promoting mental health, and developing social skills through competitive engagement at various levels (Macovei et al., 2014). A healthy and balanced diet, the avoidance of addictions, and personal hygiene are also identified as crucial factors influencing the harmonious development of the individual (Wicher et al., 2024). In this context, the role of family and educational institutions is of paramount importance in promoting the physical activity of the Alpha generation, thereby fostering the development of health-promoting habits among this age group (Dobosz et al., 2024).

The World Health Organization (WHO) has also underscored the significance of healthy lifestyles in society, defined as daily activities and habits that promote well-being across the physical, mental, and social domains (World Health Organization, 1999). This emphasis on healthy lifestyles should be a central tenet of health education, particularly in the context of developing health awareness within the family, social, and individual spheres of each individual (Piepiora & Kalina, 2023). This process not only effectively reinforces the prevention of chronic diseases, but also significantly improves quality of life and helps to build a healthy, informed society (Chaput et al., 2020). The role of collaboration between diverse communities in developing healthy habits to combine with physical activity and a healthy diet is emphasised here (Dempsey et al., 2021). It is imperative to adopt a comprehensive approach to health education, with the objective of enhancing the health of the Alpha generation and their aspiration to extend their lifespan. The present article aims to provide a perspective on Polish students of the Alpha generation and their lifestyles.

Diet and eating habits

Intense use of screen devices has been identified as a significant factor influencing the diet and food choices of the Alpha generation (Fijałkowska et al., 2019). Students who spend more time in front of a screen have been found to be more likely to choose highly processed products such as crisps, biscuits or other types of sweets (Fijałkowska et al., 2017). Concurrently, the consumption of children's food is associated with screen use, which is negatively associated with informed food choices (Rocka et al., 2022). The topic of food advertising, another factor influencing the eating habits of the youngest Alpha generation, is also relevant. Students are more likely to reach for products that are advertised (Fijałkowska et al., 2019). Research indicates that exposure to unhealthy food advertisements exerts a more significant influence on young audiences than parental attempts at influence (Arslan & Aydin, 2024). Exposure to marketing of sweets or fast food has been associated with increased consumption of these types of products, which may have an impact on the formation of healthy eating habits among students and the maintenance of normal body weight (Murillo-Llorente et al., 2025). Consequently, it is imperative to acknowledge the pivotal role of advertising that appears between television programmes in shaping the dietary preferences of the youngest members of the Alpha generation.

Mental health

A notable increase in the prevalence of mental disorders, particularly within the Alpha generation, has been observed when contrasted with preceding generations. Concurrently, there is a paucity of mental health professionals, most notably child psychiatrists, to address these needs (Piepiora, 2024). This phenomenon has prompted an examination of environmental factors that exert a substantial influence on the mental health of children and adolescents. Pupils residing in rural areas and from families with lower economic status may encounter greater challenges in accessing professional assistance (Kluczyńska & Sokołowska, 2023). Additionally, emphasis is placed on the role of school-based support systems and peer relationships in the prevention of adverse emotional outcomes. While acknowledging the higher frequency with which girls report symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorders, this

also underscores the necessity to customise specialist support to the diverse needs of different groups (Luque González et al., 2022).

Concurrently, the necessity for a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and difficulties encountered by the Alpha generation in the domain of mental health is emphasised. A significant finding is the association between the pandemic of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns with students' mental health (Panchal et al., 2021). The prevalence of symptoms indicative of anxiety and depressive disorders was observed among the Alpha generation. The severity of these symptoms has been linked to pre-existing mental health conditions and excessive social media usage (Ng & Ng, 2022). Conversely, factors such as familial support and effective parent-child communication have been identified as potential counteracting mechanisms (Wang et al., 2021). This highlights the necessity for the development of strategies aimed at enhancing students' mental well-being through both individual and systemic interactions.

Physical activity

The World Health Organization (1999) recommends that children should engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity on a daily basis. However, research indicates that this recommendation is only being met by 16.8% of children in Poland (Zembura et al., 2022). The primary factor contributing to this issue is sedentary behaviour, which includes prolonged screen time. It has been observed that these behaviours pose a significant challenge to society, particularly during leisure days, when students report spending an increased amount of time in front of screens (Petre et al., 2024). Moreover, the issue of inequality becomes particularly salient when considering access to sports facilities or activities. This problem is particularly pronounced among pupils of the Alpha generation residing in rural areas and children from lower economic backgrounds (Nadachewicz, 2024). The participation rate of pupils who have the opportunity to undertake organised forms of physical activity by physical culture associations (i.e. sports clubs) is also important. This should contribute to increasing the level of physical activity in this age group, but in Poland this is at around 54% (Zembura et al., 2022).

In the present digital age, the undertaking of regular physical activity by the Alpha generation represents a considerable challenge, as excessive use of digital media has been demonstrated to limit time and desire for physical activity (Piepiora, 2024). Consequently, importance is attributed to factors that can assist in increasing physical activity levels. These

include various school initiatives and programmes in the form of additional physical activity activities for students. Improvements in school infrastructure, health-related psychoeducation and targeted approaches to teaching students have also been proposed (Piepiora et al., 2024). The involvement of pupils' parents in cooperative physical activity games has been identified as a means of developing health-promoting habits in children and adolescents (Oh et al., 2022). Insufficient physical activity has been shown to lead to an overweight problem among the Alpha generation, with one in three children affected (Zembura et al., 2022). Regular physical activity has been demonstrated to have a positive impact not only on the somatics, but also on the human psyche. It has been shown to reduce depressive and anxiety states, and to support cognitive function and stress resistance (Piepiora et al., 2025). Consequently, the absence of regular physical activity can be a contributing factor to the development of various disorders. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the type and frequency of physical activity should be tailored to the capabilities of the Alpha generation, taking into account the individual needs of students (Piepiora, 2024).

Sleeping

Insufficient sleep in children has been demonstrated to be associated with an increased risk of overweight and obesity (Richter et al., 2024). The quality of sleep has also been shown to influence food choices made by students (Maimouna et al., 2024). The body's ability to regulate appetite through hormonal changes is limited by a lack of adequate sleep. Furthermore, sleep-deprived children lack the energy required for physical activity, which reinforces their sedentary lifestyle (Liu et al., 2012). Reduced sleep, irrespective of age, has been shown to significantly increase the risk of developing overweight and obesity (Miller et al., 2018). This emphasises the necessity for psychoeducation on sleep hygiene. This is of particular importance in the context of the Alpha generation, as it plays a crucial role in the prevention of obesity and contributes to their overall mental well-being. Poor mental health, a condition that is significantly associated with disturbances in the diurnal rhythm, daytime sleepiness, and snoring, is a salient concern (Mohammadi et al., 2025). Furthermore, the presence of sleep anxiety symptoms among students experiencing sleep difficulties may be indicative of early-stage mental health disorders, such as depression or separation anxiety (Horiuchi, 2021). This underscores the importance of incorporating sleep hygiene education into the curriculum for Alpha generation students.

Summary

In consideration of the issues that have been raised concerning diet and eating habits, mental health, physical activity, and sleep, certain insights emerge among Alpha generation students. Firstly, the dietary choices of Alpha generation students are influenced by digital media and the advertisements that appear therein, which promote foods high in sugar and fat. Additionally, the amount of time spent in front of screens significantly reduces the desire and time to prepare healthy meals and alternatives to sweets and fast food, thereby influencing students' eating habits. It is also important to consider the pace and conditions under which meals are eaten. There is a growing recognition of the importance of nutrition education, both in school and at home. Such education can play a crucial role in fostering awareness of healthy lifestyles among pupils. Collaboration between professionals and parents is vital, as is the potential of digital technology in the form of educational apps that can psycho-educate students about their dietary choices.

Secondly, the issue of young people's deteriorating mental health due to the excessive use of modern technology has been highlighted. Consequently, there is a need to modernise the current model of mental health care in order to provide greater access and support for the Alpha generation. The increase in mental disorders among the youngest students is also significant, especially among girls with regard to anxiety disorders and depression. Countermeasure processes should be based on solid environmental support, which is to be understood as healthy relationships with teachers, parents and peers.

Thirdly, there is a decline in interest in physical activity among the Alpha generation, which is associated with an increased risk of overweight and obesity among this social group. Attention is drawn to the low percentage of children whose lifestyles meet WHO recommendations, and at the same time, pupils from rural or less urbanised areas do not have access to a developed sports infrastructure, which limits the possibility for these pupils to undertake additional sports activities. This necessitates the implementation of programmes and investments designed to promote physical activity in educational institutions and cultivate healthy lifestyles among pupils.

Fourthly, adequate sleep is recognised as a pivotal component of a healthy lifestyle for Alpha Generation students. Insufficient sleep, in conjunction with inadequate sleep hygiene, has been associated with a decline in mental and physical health. The dissemination of appropriate psychoeducation, targeting both children and their parents and teachers, emphasising the significance of sleep as a restorative process, is therefore recommended. It is

also important to limit the use of screens before bedtime as appropriate health-promoting habits for students of the Alpha generation.

The lifestyles of students of the Alpha generation require professionals and parents to adopt an innovative, even groundbreaking, approach to the dissemination of knowledge about informed choices regarding diet, mental health, physical activity and sleep hygiene. The appropriate use of digital technologies, in the form of modern apps and interactive games, can serve as an effective tool in supporting healthy habits among the Alpha generation. Conducting long-term research is therefore essential to effectively assess the relationship between technology and the health and well-being of the Alpha generation in a dynamic digital world. Such a project should also highlight inequalities in access to broad social support and equal opportunities for all students to take equal care of their health.

The promotion of healthy lifestyles for students of the Alpha generation involves cooperation and multidimensional involvement at different levels. Collaborative community action should aim to enhance the quality and effectiveness of existing educational programmes and be geared towards increasing the availability of new initiatives for the benefit of today's youngest generation.

Limitations

This perspective is limited to Polish students of the Alpha generation. Therefore, the issues raised may be different in relation to students of the Alpha generation growing up in countries at a higher or lower level of socio-economic development than in Poland.

Directions for further research

It is recommended that research be conducted across various academic disciplines, with a focus on the Alpha generation and the subsequent dissemination of results. A cross-disciplinary understanding of this cohort is imperative to facilitate a more profound comprehension of their developmental challenges. This enhanced knowledge will contribute to the provision of more effective preventive healthcare, which in turn can foster healthier lifestyles among students of the Alpha generation.

Conclusions

It was determined that the sustainable development of students of the Alpha generation presents a challenge for the Polish school system. Consequently, there is a necessity for health

education and close intersectoral cooperation to minimise the negative effects of excessive use of modern technologies.

Author's contribution

Conceptualization, PAP, AB, and JV; methodology, PAP, AB, and JV; software, PAP, AB, and JV; check, PAP, AB, and JV; formal analysis, PAP, AB, and JV; investigation, PAP, AB, and JV; resources, PAP, AB, and JV; data curation, PAP, AB, and JV; writing - rough preparation, PAP, AB, and JV; writing - review and editing, PAP, AB, and JV; visualization, PAP, AB, and JV; supervision, PAP, AB, and JV; project administration, PAP, AB, and JV; receiving funding, PAP, AB, and JV.

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