

ABSTRAKTI

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## ***Young men's practices of obtaining, avoiding and sharing information on exercise, nutrition and mental health***

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Research on individuals' health information behaviour has mainly focused on purposeful and goal-directed seeking of general health information (Anker et al., 2011) or on information about serious health conditions such as diabetes (Longo et al., 2010). The health information behaviours of healthy individuals as such (Pálsdóttir, 2008) or in relation to their ongoing health conditions (Anker et al., 2011) such as physical activity, nutrition, or mental health have been less examined. This study aimed at investigating the needs for, and practices of obtaining (active seeking, active scanning, non-direct monitoring, by proxy; see McKenzie, 2003), avoiding and sharing information on exercise, nutrition and mental health in a population of young Finnish men.

A questionnaire concerning health in general and health information behaviour in particular was administered at the Finnish Defence Forces' call-ups in the city of Oulu, Finland, in September 2011 (n=623). From the statements presented on the respondents' health information needs and practices they were instructed to select the alternative that best described their level of agreement (totally agree, agree, neutral, disagree, totally disagree) or the frequency of a behaviour (never, rarely, sometimes, often, regularly) during the last month.

The information needs of the respondents were elicited with two questions concerning the interest in and the perceived lack of knowledge on a subject. Over half (56%) of the respondents were interested in exercise, 42% in nutrition and 38% in mental health information, and 72% of them thought they already knew enough about exercise, 61% about nutrition and 52% about mental health. Exercise information was reportedly obtained more often than information concerning nutrition or mental health through all the information practices investigated. For example, 40% of the respondents had often or regularly actively sought information on exercise, 26% on nutrition and 15% on mental health during the past month. The proportions of those reporting avoiding information concerning these health issues often or regularly ranged from 6% (nutrition) to 8% (mental health). As many as 56% of the respondents reported never or rarely sharing mental health information with others (e.g., talking with others about mental health issues). The proportions for exercise and nutrition information were 29% and 39% respectively.

The results of this study indicate that young men are generally more prone to seek exposure to and share information on exercise than information on nutrition and mental health. In general population nutrition has often exceeded exercise in its popularity as a subject of health information seeking, whereas in this population, when compared to exercise information, information on nutrition was far less often sought. For example, according to the PEW survey (Fox, 2006) 49% of the respondents had looked online for information on nutrition, 44% on exercise and 22% on mental health. Women, however, showed significantly more interest in information on nutrition and mental health issues than men (Fox, 2006).

Overall, gender has been found to be one of the most important socio-cultural factors affecting health-related behaviours (Courtenay, 2000). Differences in the health information behaviour of men and women have been found in earlier research (see Urquhart & Yeoman, 2010) showing, for example, that women seek health information more often than men (see e.g., Atkinson et al. 2009; Ek, Eriksson-Backa, Niemelä & Huotari, 2011; Ek & Niemelä, 2010; Rice 2006; Weaver et al. 2010). Future research could focus on not only reporting these differences in the frequency of seeking health information but more comprehensively on investigating individuals' health information behaviour from the perspective of gender. This knowledge may also be of practical use in designing targeted health promotion for both men and women (see Östlin et al., 2007).

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