

# UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED

## DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

### Health Education

**Programme director: Bettina Pikó, DSc**

#### *The overall framework of the training programme*

The training programme introduces PhD students to the history of health culture, the evolution of health as a value over the ages, from health education to modern health promotion theory. Emphasis is put on exploring the educational, social (family and environmental), cultural, religious, etc. factors that influence the health behaviour of a given population. The theoretical foundations introduce the philosophical, sociological, anthropological, psychological, pedagogical and ethical aspects of health education and health promotion, as well as current development models that will enable PhD students to conduct effective research using complex approaches.

Research so far has shown that many factors play a role in the development of health-conscious behaviour. In addition to knowledge about physical functioning and health, attitudes, beliefs, lasting and culturally determined patterns of behaviour and specific environmental conditions play an important role. An important prerequisite for the adaptation of internationally applied and confirmed effective health promotion methods is a detailed knowledge of the determinants of health-conscious behaviour in the population, and in particular in young people of school age (from primary school to graduate training). Our research themes are largely concerned with exploring these specific factors. We also explore lifestyle techniques that are effective in counteracting the negative impact of the natural and social environment on health. We plan to examine these factors in a historical context. On the other hand, we intend to carry out scientific work on the methodology of designing, operating and assessing the effectiveness of health education and health promotion programmes.

The training programme is in close cooperation with the Youth Research Group of the Institute of Behavioural Sciences of the University of Szeged, thus the cooperation with the Doctoral School allows for the extension of the research methods and tools of the research group, and the joint implementation of larger-scale surveys and research programmes. The Youth Research Unit has four priority areas where research collaboration with the Institute of Education is possible:

- Problem behaviours in adolescence (addictions; harmful addictions such as smoking, alcohol and drug use; behavioural addictions such as problematic smartphone and internet use; adolescent mental health problems such as depression, aggression, or anxiety) and their impact on the daily life of the school-age population.
- Identification and analysis of risk and protective factors (sport, spirituality, peer support, resilience and other positive psychological factors that promote well-being in young people).
- The impact of the school environment on health, including mental health protection for teachers, with a focus on prevention.
- The planning and implementation of health education programmes in schools, with particular emphasis on catch-up programmes for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, through which complex health education experiments can be carried out.

Collaboration with researchers of Education and Psychology from the Doctoral School of Education can be primarily useful in exploring how family and socialisation mechanisms influence the development of health-conscious behaviour and health-risk behaviour.

### *Main areas of research*

#### 1. Culture, health and health literacy

In order to develop effective health education programmes, we need to understand individual perceptions of health and the traditions that still exist today and influence people's views of, and reactions to, health and illness.

The PhD programme offers a range of research topics in this area:

- a) Exploring the cultural roots of health beliefs through studies of students of different ages.
- b) Analysis of the specificities of health and media literacy. Analysis of typical misconceptions about health, illness, and health determinants among students of different ages.
- c) Exploring family, educational, and societal influences on health and healthy lifestyles.
- d) Identifying groups with significant deficits and special needs and their specific problems.

#### 2. Behavioural-epidemiological studies

Analysis of problem behaviour and health behaviour in youth, exploring the prevalence and background of the problem. A number of different research topics can be carried out in this area in the context of the PhD programme:

- a) Research on chemical addictions (smoking, alcohol, and drug use)
- b) Research on behavioural addictions (problematic smartphone and internet use)
- c) Assessment of adolescent depression, aggression, and anxiety
- d) Complex lifestyle survey of school-age children (nutrition, sport, and leisure)

#### 3. Analysis of risk and protective factors

Effective health education is based on an understanding of risk and protective factors, so identifying these is a priority. The PhD programme offers a range of research topics in this area:

- a) Exploring risk factors (social inequalities, individual and environmental influences)
- b) Sport as a protective factor
- c) Spirituality and religion as protective factors
- d) Family as a protective factor
- e) Social relationships, peer support as protective factors
- f) The role of positive psychology in health protection (coherence, resilience, or coping)

#### 4. The school as a site for health education and promotion

Schooling undertakes to treat health as a value and to shape appropriate health behaviour. Developing tools for effective intervention, assessing the effectiveness of

different tools and methods. A variety of research topics can be carried out in this field as part of the PhD training:

- a) The role of curricula, the direct health education effects reflected in curricular objectives and health-related knowledge embedded in different subjects (e.g. biology). Health maintenance as a way of integrating knowledge (problem-based learning).
- b) Analysing the role of the school environment and school life in promoting health (physical, psychosocial, and residential social environment). The indirect behaviour-shaping effects of school.
- c) School health policy. Complex, learner-centred programme development, integration of health promotion aspects into school curricula.
- d) Developing health awareness in school instruction. Programme development, development of learning materials, pilot testing, evaluation of effectiveness.

#### 5. Assessing the effectiveness of health education and health promotion

Assessing the effectiveness of health education and health promotion and building on the results are the key to ensuring that the population's health culture approaches the desired level. For this reason, in addition to the implementation of international effectiveness measures, and in conjunction with them, there is a need to develop methods for assessing effectiveness that take into account national specificities and social, political, and economic impacts. Within the framework of PhD training, several research topics can be carried out in this field:

- a) Assessment of the effectiveness of health education; development of reliable indicators; adoption, adaptation and testing of international experiences.
- b) Assessments at school, maintainer and regional levels, integrating health education aspects into monitor studies.