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*Natural and civilization emergencies in Poland – general
feelings of security*

Nagle zagrożenia naturalne i cywilizacyjne w Polsce – poczucie bezpieczeństwa

Dangers caused by emergencies, disasters that put human life and health in danger exist in all regions of the globe nowadays. They are connected with the influence of natural forces, development of civilization or armed conflicts. According to the recent research the 90's are the peak period as far as the number and scale of the natural disasters are concerned. In comparison with the 1960's the frequency of their occurrence increased three times. In 1996 594 cases of catastrophes caused by natural calamities were stated, and the damage was estimated at 60 billion USD (7).

It is medical service that deals with the application of first-aid to the victims of accidents or catastrophes but the help is more effective if it is the result of the cooperation with other rescue services (fire brigade, police, civil defence) (5). Accidental witnesses of the events play an equally important part. They are supposed to start rescue actions before qualified life-savers arrive. In many cases their actions are decisive to the victims' lives. In the cases of blood circulation or breath halt there is, in fact, very little time for beginning reanimation actions, namely – 5 minutes. Medical services will not be able to reach the stage of the accident within such a short period of time. Thus, the survival of the victims depends on the correct reaction of the witnesses. In Poland first-aid trainings and courses for the whole society have been organized for many years. Among the most popular trainings there are: cadet corps classes, driving-licence courses, the Scouts and the Red Cross trainings. In theory, there are approximately 18 mln citizens of Poland who underwent such trainings. (8) Nevertheless we can trace feelings of lack of self-confidence while applying first-aid, resulting from the defects in theoretical knowledge and poor practical skills.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The aim of the paper was to examine the opinions of students about the possibility of the occurrence of disasters in our country. The people under the survey were also asked if they feel ready for acting in cases of emergency and if they feel the need of information about first-aid application and what channels of information they prefer.

The auditorial survey was drawn up. The survey was carried out among UMCS students. 251 of them filled in the survey correctly. The results underwent statistic analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The answers to the questions included in the survey show that the most probable kind of disaster that we can come across in Poland are natural disasters (90.0%), then – civilization emergencies (85.1%) and the least expected are armed conflicts (27.1%). According to the data gathered by the Central Statistic Office there are 27 regions and 80 towns of intensive emergency. They include about 1/3 of the country area inhabited by more than 35% of the population. The most important emergencies are: radioactive, chemical, fire and flood (7). Nearly all of the subjects (96%) claim that the issue of prevention of disasters and emergencies should be taken into account in the country's policy. Prevention is cheaper than maintaining an effective system of reaction. The efforts of the western countries focus mainly upon preventing disasters by means of planning, diagnosing, estimating, organizing and educating citizens since the young age. The solution of the problem should be based on the local level that should proceed along the lines of central government since it is the local government that plays the crucial part in the initial stage of rescue actions before the central authorities intervene (1). Only 12.2% of the students

Abilities to apply first-aid in society

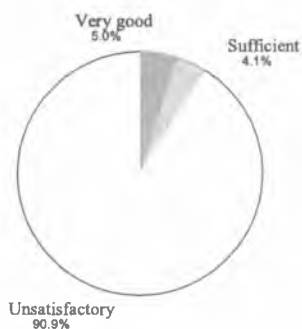


Fig. 1

maintain that there is an effective system of reaction in case of emergency. Therefore not many people feel secure in our country, 65.2% of them would rather live in one of the western countries if the disaster was to occur.

When asked about the level of abilities to apply first-aid in our society as many as 90.9% of the subjects found it highly unsatisfactory; 4.1% found it sufficient and 5% - considered it very good (Fig. 1). According to 94.1% of the subjects the ability to apply first-aid by all citizens plays a significant part in the success of the rescue action in cases of disasters and major accidents. It is a factor that is considered to be as important as the work of fire brigade (95%) or medical service (93.2%). A large percentage of the subjects, namely 66.5% took part in first-aid trainings. 80.1% of the students claimed that they felt the need of participation in such a training during their studies at the university. Likewise, a significant part of the subjects (85.5%) would like to find out more about the ways of applying first-aid to the people who need it. It can be achieved by means of the courses at the university – 80.1% or in the secondary school – 60.6%. 44.3% of the subjects are willing to watch educational programmes and 29.4% - will read books or newspaper articles devoted to the problem (Fig. 2). Hence mass media should devote more

Ways of transmitting information about first-aid rules

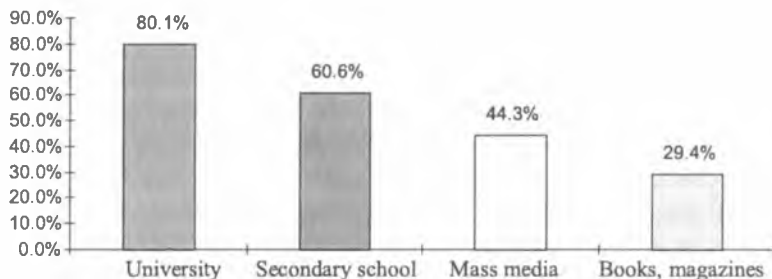


Fig. 2

attention to the education of the audience even at the cost of transmitting sensational news. The journalists' responsibility for the ways of transmitting news grows in cases of emergency. General sense of security is violated and the work of many important state institutions is disturbed in such situations. Seeking sensational news then can only intensify chaos and misinformation (4).

Facing emergency 32.6% of the subjects would take up rescue actions, 57% - would feel completely helpless and 15.4% will assume a passive attitude towards the events waiting for other people's initiative (Fig. 3). The results are surprising if we take into account the fact that first-aid courses are really frequent. Nevertheless, very few people

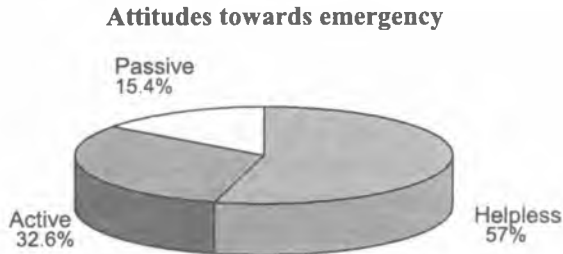


Fig. 3

will decide to act and many of them estimate the abilities to apply aid in our society at a very low level. It is probably because first-aid trainings bring too much detailed information that is not necessary. The majority of our society loses the essence of first-aid application, which triggers fear of making a mistake in real life situations. Such an attitude indicates the lack of sufficient amount of practical exercises (8). In order to help a victim of the accident it is enough to know how to staunch the flow of blood or how to act in the case of backbone injury. The training should also include the knowledge of the factors that help a witness to apply first-aid. It turns out that the more witnesses of the event the more prone we are to ignore it. If nobody starts the action the phenomenon of ignorance gets accumulated. Such a situation results in the dispersal and decrease in the individual responsibility for starting life-saving actions. The research shows that we help more willingly when there are no more witnesses (85%) and more rarely when others observe the events (when there are 5 witnesses the aid is applied in 31% of the cases) (2). In recent years the decision to take up life-saving actions is the result of estimating one's own benefits and losses. People are aware of the danger of becoming infected with AIDS or other dangerous diseases as well as exposing oneself to the aggression of criminal groups (2). If the significant part of our society was capable of applying first-aid about 10,000 deaths could be avoided every year (9). What would the situation look like in the case of disaster?

CONCLUSIONS

1. 94.1% of the students claim that the ability to apply first-aid by the whole society plays an important part, comparable to the work of medical services and fire brigade, in cases of disasters.

2. The knowledge of the first-aid rules is unsatisfactory even though 66.5% of the subjects took part in various trainings. 80.1% of them would like to participate in such classes at the university level.

3. The programme of the courses in Poland requires radical changes because of low effectiveness. They should be geared towards basic issues of first-aid application as well as practical abilities, not towards theoretical medical knowledge. Psychological aspects of making a decision about starting first-aid application by accidental witnesses should be discussed especially thoroughly.

4. Mass media should not only inform about the events or emergencies but also educate.

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STRESZCZENIE

Celem pracy było zbadanie opinii studentów na temat możliwości wystąpienia w naszym kraju katastrof oraz czy respondenci czują się przygotowani do działania w tego typu zdarzeniach. Pytano też, czy czują potrzebę informacji na temat udzielania pierwszej pomocy oraz jakie drogi przekazu preferują. Z odpowiedzi na pytania zawarte w ankiecie

wynika, że w Polsce najczęściej możemy mieć do czynienia z katastrofami naturalnymi (90,0%), następnie z cywilizacyjnymi (85,1%) oraz w najmniejszym stopniu (27,1%) z konfliktem zbrojnym. Prawie wszyscy ankietowani (96%) twierdzą, że problem zapobiegania katastrofom i nagłym wypadkom powinien być uwzględniany w polityce państwa. Za ledwie 12,2% studentów twierdzi, że jest w Polsce opracowany system działania w nadzwyczajnych sytuacjach. Stąd niewiele osób czuje się bezpiecznie w naszym kraju, 65,2% wolałoby w przypadku katastrofy znaleźć się w jednym z krajów zachodnich.

Oceniając poziom umiejętności niesienia pierwszej pomocy przez nasze społeczeństwo aż 90,9% ankietowanych uważa go za niedostateczny. Umiejętność udzielania pierwszej pomocy przez wszystkich obywateli odgrywa znaczącą rolę w powodzeniu akcji ratowniczej w przypadku katastrof i dużych wypadków według 94,1 % ankietowanych. Jest to czynnik podobnej wartości jak działanie straży pożarnej (95%) czy służby zdrowia (93,2%) Wśród ankietowanych duża część, a mianowicie 66,5%, przebyła w swoim życiu kursy udzielania pierwszej pomocy. Na pytanie, czy widzą potrzebę szkolenia w czasie studiów, 80,1% studentów odpowiedziało twierdząco. Również znaczna część badanych (85,5%) odczuwa potrzebę informacji o tym, jak zachować się wobec osób potrzebujących pomocy. Preferowanym sposobem są szkolenia na studiach (80,1%) i w szkole średniej (60,6%). Chętnie obejrzy programy czy audycje informacyjne 44,3%, a do książek czy czasopism sięgnie 29,4% osób. Wynika stąd, że mass media powinny więcej uwagi zwracać na edukację widza, nie tylko na przekazywanie sensacyjnych informacji.