LITHUANIAN UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

International Summer School Practice

The changes of role models among adolescents and their assocations with lifestyle and health behaviours

Adolescence is a key period for forming identity and lifelong health behaviours. Role models (people whom adolescents look up to when setting their goals, attitudes, and behaviour) are generally assumed to influence these choices, yet health research on role models remains scarce. Most of the existing studies are old, use small or specific samples, and treat role models mainly as sources of career aspirations rather than health-related decisions (Morgenroth et al., 2015; Bryant & Zimmerman, 2003; Bird et al., 2012). At the same time, the role model available to adolescents is changing quickly: young people spend more and more time online (Trott et al., 2022), thus social media celebrities and influencers increasingly compete with family members, friends, teachers and athletes as figures to emulate. Recent literature on influencers and parasocial relationships suggests that such figures can shape adolescent health behaviours in both positive and negative directions (Engel et al., 2024; Engel et al., 2025; Li et al., 2026). However, these studies rarely measure role models as a construct, and almost none use representative adolescent samples.

Previous analysis of the Lithuanian 2022 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey found that 71% of adolescents reported having a role model, most often family members (33%), friends (24%), social media celebrities (15%), athletes (12%) and TV stars (11%). Family members and athletes as role models were associated with more favourable lifestyle indicators, whereas friends and social media celebrities were associated with less favourable sleep, smoking and social media use (Golambiauskas et al., 2025). The 2026 Lithuanian HBSC survey also includes a role model module, which allows these findings to be followed up and expanded.

Novelty. The project will provide the first nationally representative trend data on adolescents' role models, comparing two independent cross-sectional HBSC surveys conducted four years apart (2022 and 2026). It will show whether digital role models (social media celebrities, influencers) are gaining ground relative to role models in adolescents' close environment.

Aim. To assess how adolescents' role models changed between 2022 and 2026 and how the prevalence and type of role model is associated with lifestyle and health behaviours in Lithuanian adolescents aged 11–17.

Methods. The study is a secondary analysis of the Lithuanian HBSC 2022 and primary analysis of the 2026 survey data (combined N~13 000), collected according to the international HBSC protocol. Open-ended responses will be coded using a structured codebook through qualitative content analysis. Statistical analysis will include descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate statistics.

Tasks of the student: Data cleaning and preparation of the 2026 role model data set; Development and application of the codebook for open-ended responses; Literature on role models search and review; Statistical analyses under supervision (SPSS) and preparation of tables and figures; Drafting sections of a scientific paper (introduction, methods, results).

Learning outcomes. During the practice, students will: learn the design, sampling and protocol of a large national school-based survey; gain hands-on experience with real population data: cleaning, recoding and data quality control; learn to systematically code qualitative open-ended data; apply regression modelling to epidemiological data and interpret the results critically; develop academic writing skills; become familiar with research ethics and the handling of sensitive data from minors; work in an interdisciplinary research team (public health and psychology).

Students who contribute substantially will be offered co-authorship of the resulting publication.