UDC 636.13.046.2: 615.825 + 159.937.54 + 613.72
DOI https://doi.org/10.32782/2077-6594/2025.4/01

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The impact of horse riding on the physical and psychological state of high school students

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Вплив верхової їзди на фізичний та психологічний стан здобувачів вищої школи

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Introduction

In the current economic and political conditions, there is a growing need to promote a healthy lifestyle among people of different age groups. In this context, the authors investigated the impact of horseback riding on improving individuals' physical and psycho-emotional health [1–2].

Sport, including equestrian sports, belongs to those areas of human activity that concisely and clearly reflect the overall political and socio-economic life of a country, and are among the first to respond to such negative phenomena as economic crises, global pandemics, and military conflicts. Today, domestic equestrian sports are experiencing extremely challenging times due to the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic and the full-scale Russian military aggression [3].

Over the past few decades, horseback riding and equestrian sports have become among the most popular and promising in the world [4]. In Ukraine as well, there is significant resource and infrastructural potential. Undoubtedly, after Ukraine's victory over Russian aggression, equestrian sports in the country will have every opportunity for dynamic development, including the advancement of its Paralympic disciplines.

The purpose of our study was to identify the impact of horseback riding on the physical and psycho-emotional state of higher education students.

Object, materials and research methods

Object of research: horseback riding as a means of improving the physical and psycho-emotional state of higher education applicants.

Participants. This study involved 10 applicants from Lutsk National Technical University. All of them were young men and their age was 18–20 years (19.2 ± 1.517). The research was conducted at the "Antares" equestrian club (village Shepel, Volyn region). The experimental group consisted of 10 applicants who had no prior involvement in any form of equestrian sport; none of the young men had previously practiced horseback riding. Their physical and psycho-emotional state depended on the course and effectiveness of the training process.

Testing of the experimental group was conducted before and after the horseback riding session. The participants were asked to complete the WAM (Well-being, Activity, Mood) test, with clarification that they should not overthink their self-assessment in order to obtain more accurate results. The average score of the initial test results before and after the session was then calculated.

Research methods. The following research methods were used in this scientific study:

1) analysis of scientific and methodological literature;
2) pedagogical observation;
3) pedagogical experiment;
4) methods of mathematical statistics.

Analysis of scientific and methodological literature. The analysis of scientific and methodological literature on horse riding was conducted by studying 18 foreign literary sources, including publications in the scientometric databases Scopus, PubMed, Index Copernicus, and others. The main focus of the search for scientific information was the issue of the SAN of applicants to higher education institutions.

Pedagogical observation. Pedagogical observation is a purposeful systematic perception and analysis of the educational and training process and its evaluation based on a pre-developed plan.

Pedagogical experiment. The pedagogical experiment involved conducting a testing procedure. Among the many methods available for assessing psycho-emotional state, we selected the WAM test. This method is designed for

self-monitoring and self-assessment of well-being, activity and mood.

The WAM scale consists of indices (3 2 1 0 1 2 3) and is placed between thirty pairs of words with opposite meanings, reflecting mobility, speed, and tempo of functional processes (activity), strength, health, fatigue (well-being), as well as characteristics of emotional state (mood).The advantages of the test include its brevity and the possibility of repeated use over a certain period of time.

One should correlate their current state with the described indicators using the multilevel scale. You need to choose and mark the number that most accurately reflects your condition at the present moment.

Methods of mathematical statistics. The research results were processed using commonly accepted methods of mathematical statistics. The mathematical processing of the empirical material was carried out to interpret the results of the pedagogical experiment. The following statistical procedures were performed: comparison and determination of the significance of differences between individual groups using Student's t-test at a significance level of no less than 0.05. The statistical analysis of the obtained data was conducted using SPSS software, which enabled the measurement analysis and calculation of basic statistical values.

Research Results

According to the results of the initial testing, it was found that after just one session of therapeutic horseback riding, nearly 80% of beginner riders experienced improvements in their psycho-emotional and physical state.

The results indicate that horseback riding has a positive impact on the health of young men and can be used as a means of human recovery-both on a physical and psychological level. For clarity, the data obtained from the study are presented in Figures 1 and 2.

Therapeutic horseback riding offers numerous advantages compared to other wellness methods:

1) To begin with, this wellness method is associated with treatment that involves no pain, coercion, or fear – no complex procedures or medications are required;

2) Additionally, it has virtually no contraindications, while the range of injuries and illnesses for which therapeutic horseback riding is recommended is quite broad;

3) And of course, therapeutic horseback riding combines both rehabilitative and socio-psychological effects [5–7].

The positive effects of horseback riding are due to the following factors:

1) A positive emotional effect is created as early as the first interaction with the horse;

2) Human muscles are warmed by the horse's body heat and massaged by its powerful muscular movements (special bitless saddles are used in wellness session);

3) During horseback riding and hippotherapy, all muscle groups of the rider are engaged, which has a beneficial impact on the human body [8–10].

Thanks to all these factors, there is an overall improvement in the body's condition, as well as normalization of vascular and muscular tone, strengthening of the respiratory and circulatory systems, positive effects on the musculoskeletal system, improved coordination and posture, and better balance. Games and exercises on horseback, as well as interaction with the animal, stimulate the ability and desire to listen. The young rider gains the opportunity to process experiences and build self-confidence [11].

In cases of lowered psycho-emotional state due to emotional overstrain, stress, heavy academic workloads, or internal experiences related to various life situations,

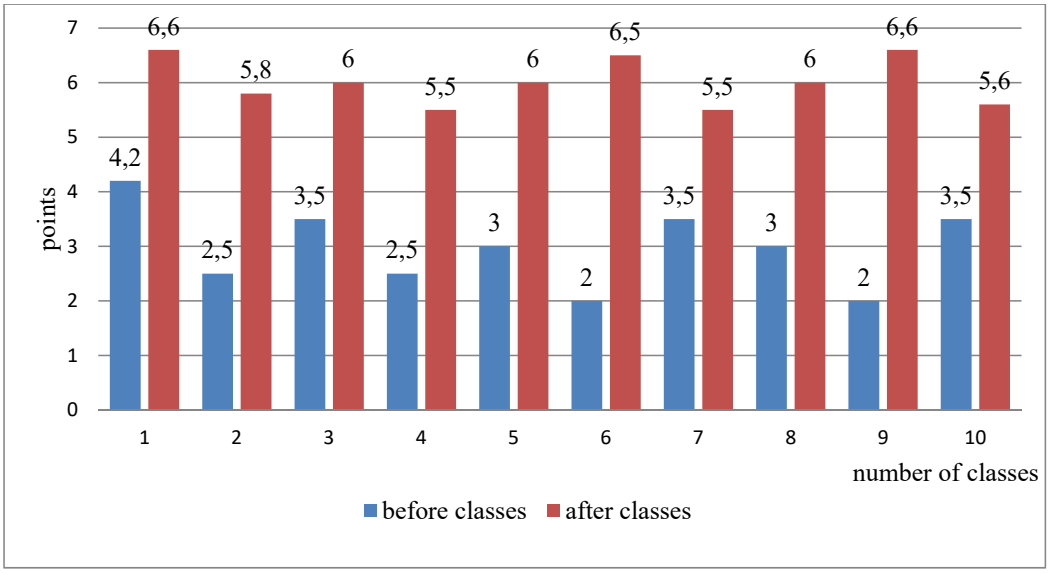

Fig. 1. Test results of the beginner riders group during initial horseback riding sessions

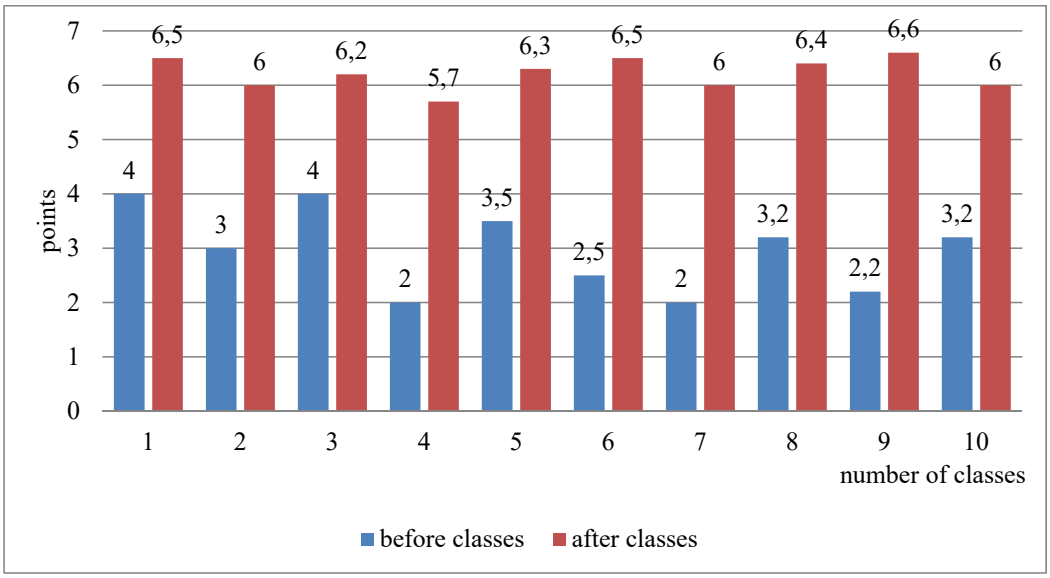

Fig. 2. Test results of the beginner riders group during final horseback riding sessions

horseback riding can be recommended. The «recharge» effect on emotional and physical state is almost immediate; however, to achieve stable results, regular training – at least two to three times a week – is recommended. Sessions should ideally take place outdoors and be conducted individually with a coach, as this increases training efficiency by avoiding distractions from other riders. Each session should last 30–45 minutes.

For comfortable and safe training, special gear is required: breeches with suede patches for better grip in the saddle, riding boots or gaiters, comfortable footwear, gloves, a helmet, and a protective vest [12].

Undoubtedly, horseback riding significantly enhances harmonious and comprehensive physical development. It also positively influences self-esteem and self-confidence, improves willpower and concentration, social interaction, and helps youth form more harmonious relationships with the surrounding world. Moreover, it assists them in finding the best solutions to personal challenges [13].

After analyzing the process of horseback riding's impact on overall human well-being and considering recommendations from leading international equestrian and hippotherapy coaches and instructors, we have developed the following monthly training plan for beginners [14], provided that training occurs at least 2–3 times per week. It is also important to acknowledge that each person is unique and has individual abilities. Some learn faster, others slower. The rider should not move on to the next, more intensive session if the previous one was only moderately mastered. Therefore, an individual approach to each rider is essential [15].

Methodology for improving physical and psychological well-being through horseback riding.

Session 1

Rider position training on the lunge line:

– Walking without stirrups (relaxed) while performing exercises instructed by the trainer;

– Walking with stirrups while practicing balance exercises;

– Trotting while standing in the stirrups;

– Performing relaxation exercises (while the horse is standing still).

These exercises are conducted in two sets. Session duration: 40 minutes.

Session 2

Rider Position Training Without a Saddle on the Lunge Line (with possible use of surcingle):

– Walking while performing exercises assigned by the trainer;

– Trotting while practicing balance exercises;

– Performing relaxation exercises (horse is standing still).

Exercises are performed in two sets. Duration: 30 minutes.

Session 3

Rider Position Training in the Saddle Without the Lunge Line:

– Basics of controlling the horse using reins, leg aids, etc;

– Walking without stirrups (relaxed) while performing trainer-assigned exercises;

– Walking with stirrups while practicing balance exercises;

– Trotting while standing in stirrups.

Exercises are performed in two sets. Duration: 40 minutes.

Session 4

Independent Rider Position Training in the Arena:

– Walking with stirrups while practicing balance exercises;

– Trotting in the arena, including exercises on circles;

– Trotting while standing in stirrups;

– Practicing transitions: "walk-trot-halt" in the arena.

Exercises are performed in two sets. Duration: 40 minutes.

Session 5

Equestrian Gymnastics:

– Walking and trotting without tension; transitions throughout the arena;

– Walking over ground poles;

– Trotting over ground poles;

– Transitions: "walk-trot-halt".

Exercises are performed in two sets. Duration: 40 minutes.

Session 6

Theoretical and Practical Outdoor Lesson:

– Theoretical session;

– Horseback ride in the field.

Duration: 40–60 minutes.

Session 7

Learning and Practicing Arena Riding Elements:

– Walking in the arena;

– Light trotting;

– Trotting on circles, serpentines, and diagonals;

– Transitions: "walk-trot-halt".

Exercises are performed in two sets. Duration: 40 minutes.

Session 8

Practicing Arena Riding Elements. Canter:

– Walking and trotting on circles, serpentines, and diagonals;

– Transitions: "walk-trot-halt";

– Cantering on the lunge line;

– Walking in the arena.

Exercises are performed in two sets. Duration: 40 minutes.

Session 9

Theoretical and Practical Outdoor Lesson:

– Theoretical session;

– Horseback ride in the field.

Duration: 40–60 minutes.

Session 10

Learning and Practicing Arena Riding Elements Including Canter:

– Walking and trotting in the arena;

– Cantering (on the lunge line or independently);

– Trotting on circles, serpentines, and diagonals;

– Transitions: "walk-trot-halt".

Exercises are performed in two sets. Duration: 40 minutes.

"Free Day" Session:

Theoretical and Practical Activities:

– Outing in the forest by carriage (or sleigh in winter);

– Basics of horse care;

– Studying and reviewing topics: horse handling safety, horse and rider equipment, competition rules, etc.

Discussion of the Research Results

The concept of hippotherapy is attributed to French physician and psychologist J. Lallery, who defined the HT method as a psychosomatic therapy aimed at helping individuals achieve motor and psychological independence, and adapt to new and changing circumstances. However, the first studies highlighting the positive effects of horseback riding were published in 1875 by Chassigne in Paris, where results were shown for the treatment of hemiplegia, paraplegia, and other conditions [16].

In the 1950s, hippotherapy began to spread across Europe, and by the late 1960s, it had reached the United States. The starting point in the history of modern hippotherapy is considered to be the year 1950. This was the year of the XV Olympic Games in Helsinki, where Danish athlete Lis Hartel, who suffered from severe poliomyelitis, won second place. Her doctor, recognizing her depressive state (as she was formerly an equestrian athlete), insisted as part of an experiment that she ride a horse regularly for nine years. The result was sensational: she not only nearly fully recovered but also succeeded in winning an Olympic medal [17].

In 1953, the first specialized hippotherapy center for children with disabilities was established in Norway. Afterward, hippotherapy centers began opening in many countries around the world. Today, there are over 1,000 such centers in the United States and more than 700 in the United Kingdom. In France, professional training programs in hippotherapy are available, including a dedicated faculty at the Paris University of Sport and Health. In Tbilisi, Georgia, the Medical Academy has opened a department of physical therapy and riding therapy. A special congress on hippotherapy was held in Hamburg in 1982.

Modern scientific literature frequently refers to a series of studies confirming the positive impact of hippotherapy on general motor function, cognitive development, and emotional-affective activity in children. The authors of these studies define hippotherapy as a new type of therapy that uses horses in combination with physical, occupational, and speech therapy to improve motivation, attention, and, consequently, the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions [18].

Horseback Riding is an enjoyable and recreational sport in which the rider can establish a connection with the animal and acquire riding skills. However, most people are unaware of the therapeutic benefits of horseback riding for special populations, particularly those where deficits in motor coordination affect the social, emotional, and academic aspects of a child's life (e.g., cerebral palsy, genetic disorders, Down syndrome, and developmental delays).

Horseback riding is a physical activity that engages and develops various muscle groups. When walking, the horse acts as a «therapeutic intermediary» for the rider, transmitting between 90 to 110 multidirectional motor impulses similar to those involved in human walking. These movements trigger corresponding reactions in the patient, helping to adjust motor activity. Through stimulation of balance-maintaining responses, the following goals are achieved:

– normalization of muscle tone;

– improvement of movement coordination;

– muscle strengthening;

– achieving motor symmetry.

The psychological mechanism lies in the interaction with a living being – a horse, a large, temperamental, and powerful animal. Gaining control over the horse gives the patient a sense of victory – not only over the animal but also over their fears and illness. Communication and bonding between the person and the horse are nonverbal: the horse senses the emotional and physical state of the rider.

More recently, hippotherapy has drawn the attention of physical, occupational, and speech therapists. This is no surprise, as it involves using the horse as a therapeutic tool by engaging the rider's core muscles; the horse's gait stimulates patients to use their postural control to remain upright. Alongside improvements in motor and postural control, researchers have observed that social and emotional interactions can lead to increased quality of life and self-esteem.

The hippotherapy program is usually divided into modules: initial session, mounting the horse, trial session, and main sessions. The first stage aims to create a friendly and supportive atmosphere. The hippotherapist introduces the child to the horse, shows them where the sessions will take place, and allows them to pet the animal. This helps patients relax and makes it easier to motivate them to participate.

Mounting the horse is a complex step. Because patients often have motor difficulties, the specialist plays a very active role at the beginning. Once the patient acquires some basic skills, the hippotherapist shifts to a more passive strategy – supporting and assisting only as needed to help maintain balance.

The first session (lasting 10–15 minutes) is conducted with the goal of fostering interest in the activity (gradually, the duration of sessions increases up to one hour). The instructor assesses the rider's physical capabilities and develops a personalized session plan.

Regular sessions involve consistent attendance and the execution of a structured rehabilitation plan. Exercises are supplemented and adjusted depending on the rider's progress and demonstrated skills. After each session, the rider's well-being and psychological state are monitored. The session plan is created based on the specific issue for which the patient is seeking therapy.

Hippotherapy involves a multidisciplinary approach, meaning that several specialists work in parallel to develop a comprehensive rehabilitation program.

Session frequency is typically two to three times per week; the course can last from one and a half months or longer, depending on the therapeutic effect and the patient's personal goals. Healing from severe chronic conditions may require not just months, but years of regular rehabilitation.

Prospects for further research

Prospects for further research will be to determine the impact of horseback riding on the physical and psychological state of schoolchildren.

Conclusions

Thus, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Horseback riding is effectively used in sports and wellness practices. The level of physical exertion during riding depends on the horse's gait and the rider's position. Riding at a working trot is a great alternative to an active walking pace, while cantering resembles running across uneven terrain. During calm horseback walking, the impact on joints and the spine is significantly lower than during brisk walking or running, while nearly all muscle groups must be engaged to maintain balance;

2. The implementation of an individualized methodology for improving physical and psychological well-being through horseback riding, which included a wide range of individualized exercises aimed at coordination, yielded positive results for higher education students;

3. Horseback riding positively affects not only physical fitness but also the psycho-emotional health of young people, as demonstrated by the results of our WAM testing. Interaction with the horse helps youth disconnect from life's worries, allowing them to distance themselves from internal and interpersonal conflicts. The skills gained through horseback riding transfer into daily life, increasing self-confidence and self-reliance. A horse teaches a person how to communicate and cooperate. Finding common ground with this majestic animal and trying to negotiate with it yields significant benefits in human relationships. This style of communication – without aggression or shouting, and with control over negative emotions – becomes a model for conflict resolution through compromise. People often waste considerable energy on conflicts, family quarrels, and stress at work or school, which undermines their mental health and, consequently, their physical well-being. In such moments, it becomes difficult to concentrate, and overall effectiveness in daily tasks decreases, leading to long-term consequences;

4. This article has demonstrated that horseback riding contributes not only to physical improvement but also to emotional recovery, renewal of life energy, and internal resources.

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The purpose of our study was to identify the impact of horseback riding on the physical and psycho-emotional state of higher education students.

Materials and methods. This study involved 10 applicants from Lutsk National Technical University. All of them were young men and their age was 18–20 years (19.2 ± 1.517). The research was conducted at the «Antares» equestrian club (village Shepel, Volyn region). The experimental group consisted of 10 applicants who had no prior involvement in any form of equestrian sport; none of the young men had previously practiced horseback riding. Their physical and psycho-emotional state depended on the course and effectiveness of the training process.

The following research methods were used in this scientific study: analysis of scientific and methodological literature; pedagogical observation; pedagogical experiment; methods of mathematical statistics.

Results. On the results of the initial testing, it was found that after just one session of therapeutic horseback riding, nearly 80% of beginner riders showed improvements in both their psycho-emotional and physical condition. These results indicate that horseback riding has a positive effect on the health of young men and can be used as a means of human rehabilitation-both physically and psychologically.

Conclusions. In this article, the authors demonstrated that horseback riding contributes not only to the improvement of a person's physical condition but also to the recharge of their psycho-emotional state, replenishment of vital energy, and internal resources.

Key words: hippotherapy, young men, well-being, activity, mood.

Мета роботи – виявити вплив верхової їзди на фізичний та психоемоційний стан здобувачів закладу вищої освіти.

Матеріали та методи. У цьому дослідженні брали участь 10 здобувачів вищої освіти чоловічої статі віком від 18 до 20 років (19,2 ± 1,517), усі з Луцького національного технічного університету, Луцьк, Україна. Дослідження проводилося на території кінного клубу «Антарес» (с. Шепель, Волинська обл.). Експериментальна група складалася з 10 здобувачів освіти, головною особливістю якої була непричетність до будь-якого виду кінного спорту, всі молоді люди ще жодного разу не займалися верховою їздою, їх фізичний та психоемоційний стан залежить від перебігу процесу тренування та його результативності.

У цьому науковому дослідженні було використано такі методи дослідження: аналіз науково-методичної літератури; педагогічне спостереження; педагогічний експеримент; методи математичної статистики.

Результати. За результатами вихідного тестування встановлено, що після заняття оздоровчою верховою їздою майже у 80 % вершників-новачків покращився психоемоційний та фізичний стан уже на першому занятті. Отримані результати свідчать про те, що верхова їзда позитивно впливає на здоров'я юнаків і її можна використовувати як спосіб відновлення людини як на фізичному, так і на психологічному рівні.

Позитивний вплив верхової їзди зумовлений такими факторами:

1) позитивний емоційний ефект створюється вже за першої взаємодії з конем;

2) м'язи людини зігріваються теплом тіла коня та масажуються його потужними м'язовими рухами (під час оздоровчих сеансів використовуються спеціальні безвуздові сідла);

3) під час верхової їзди та іпотерапії задіюються всі групи м'язів вершника, що благотворно впливає на організм людини.

Завдяки всім цим факторам відбувається загальне покращення стану організму, а також нормалізація судинного та м'язового тонусу, зміцнення дихальної та кровоносної систем, позитивний вплив на опорно-рухову систему, покращення координації та постави, краща рівновага. Ігри та вправи верхи, а також взаємодія з твариною стимулюють здатність і бажання слухати. Юний вершник отримує можливість опрацьовувати досвід і розвивати впевненість у собі.

Безсумнівно, верхова їзда значно сприяє гармонійному та всебічному фізичному розвитку. Вона також позитивно впливає на самооцінку та впевненість у собі, покращує силу волі й концентрацію, соціальну взаємодію та допомагає юнакам формувати більш гармонійні стосунки з навколишнім світом. Ба більше, вона допомагає їм знаходити найкращі рішення особистих проблем.

Проаналізувавши процес впливу верхової їзди на загальне самопочуття юнакам і врахувавши рекомендації провідних міжнародних тренерів та інструкторів з кінного спорту та іпотерапії, ми розробили щомісячний план тренувань для початківців за умови, що тренування відбуватимуться принаймні 2–3 рази на тиждень. Також важливо визнати, що кожна людина унікальна та має індивідуальні здібності. Одні навчаються швидше, інші – повільніше. Вершник не повинен переходити до наступного, більш інтенсивного тренування, якщо попереднє було освоєно лише помірно. Тому індивідуальний підхід до кожного вершника є важливим.

Висновки. Упровадження індивідуалізованої методики покращення фізичного та психологічного благополуччя за допомогою верхової їзди, яка передбачала широкий спектр індивідуалізованих вправ, спрямованих на координацію, дало позитивні результати для здобувачів закладу вищої освіти.

Верхова їзда позитивно впливає не лише на фізичну форму, а й на психоемоційне здоров'я молоді, що підтверджують результати нашого тестування САН (самопочуття, активність, настрій). Взаємодія з конем допомагає молоді відключитися від життєвих турбот, даючи їй змогу дистанціюватися від внутрішніх та міжособистісних конфліктів.

У цій статті автори довели, що заняття верховою їздою сприяють не лише покращенню фізичного стану людини, а й перезарядженню її психоемоційного стану, поповненню життєвої енергії та ресурсів.

Ключові слова: іпотерапія, юнаки, самопочуття, активність, настрій.

Conflict of interest: absent.
Конфлікт інтересів: відсутній.

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Стаття надійшла до редакції 01.09.2025
Дата першого рішення 08.12.2025
Стаття подана до друку 30.12.2025