



Uniwersytet
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CHILDHOOD BETWEEN DUTIES AND PLAY

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- The aim of the theme is diagnosis, analysis, and interpretation of the phenomenon that is about a certain tendency of parents to burden their children with too many educational activities. This tendency is noticeable in the social reality as well as studied in the literature.
- The main task was to outline theoretically the socio-cultural and economic sources of imbalance between working, studying, and playing. Also it was to catch and describe contexts that crucially determine proportions between working, studying, and playing.

- The research targeted on gaining data concerning a week's amount of time that primary school students had; as well as showing proportions between children's everyday activities provided by adults, and those activities chosen by children themselves being their own free decisions.
- Very interesting is how children spend their free time and which activities they often choose in their leisure time.

Competent control over such a deficit good as time should be one of the key educational challenges!

Crucial thing is to avoid overloading and negative results!

- Multiplicity of the childhood concept;
- Adults' aspirations that are realized through subordination childhood to challenges of adulthood;
- Popular views on childhood as a stage of being most influenced by education; the phenomenon of psychological improvement;
- Social media campaigns aiming at stimulation of learning development (i.e. 'Whole Poland Reads to Children' campaign);
- Growing awareness of imbalance within the social access to goods; instability as far as the sense of justice and safety in the area of poorer social groups;
- High level of education, diplomas, foreign languages skills, attractive and diverse competences; (delusive) guarantee for fine future for our children;
- Very intense work of mothers and fathers which disables managing their time properly so that all family members are content; what is more, such hard work makes family relations blunt;
- School marks, successes and achievements of a child become the value of parental care; a child is a parent's visit card.



The period of childhood becomes a new phenomenon and gets a picture that requires a new approach and discussion. For me the whole picture, however, is clearly visible in the everyday activities, responsibilities, moments of satisfaction, and arguments, as well. The research task is to describe the everyday life of a Polish pupil, their activities which fill every day. The main aspect of the research was to analyse a week's amount of time that a primary school pupil had. The basic aim was to obtain detailed descriptions of a child's every day, as well as to provoke deep thoughts in relation to it. My intention was to illustrate a picture of childhood portrayed by children themselves.



Theoretical presumptions focused on a group of children aged 7 (at the beginning of the primary school) to 13 (at the end of primary school).

The current research serves to sketch a picture of childhood presented by children themselves, the quality of this particular period of time, the elements that carry satisfaction and happiness, but also problems and subjective discomfort.

The research issue was about to find out **at what degree children are overburdened with educational activities.**



An assumption was accepted that too many activities take place only in case when the number of hours spent on studying (school lessons, homework, and educational activities) is more than 8 per day, that is more than 40 hours per week. The assumption is right as the Polish Labour Code guarantees no more than 40 hours of work per week as far as adult employees are concerned. Moreover, **the proportions between the time that is organised by parents and the time left free for children are very interesting.** A primary school pupil has the right to manage their own spare time, at least partly, which is very reasonable in terms of child's development. **The way children control their own free time without their parents** is also very interesting matter to discuss. What activities are mainly chosen by children?



The research was accomplished as a diagnostic survey where the main tool was a detailed list of auto-registered time. The sheet was prepared in a way so that a child would easily put down all the consecutive activities undertaken every following hour of every day of the week.

Data that was registered: age, sex, and type of school as well as its localization. In the survey there were 114 children that took part in it. The surveyed children attended public primary school, classes from 1st to 6th, of big city, town, and a country. Also, there were children from private primary school, aged 7-13. To sum up, there were 51 boys and 63 girls surveyed.



Simple and written construction designed for children was favourable in terms of children's notes (homework, school lessons, etc.), **organised activities by parents** (additional foreign languages classes, sports activities, music and art classes, etc.). All this kind of actions take place according to parents' wishes in order to make their children fulfil the parents' aims – in this case such behaviour has a clearly educational character.



Another group of activities is about actions that are undertaken by children themselves during their spare time. The particular amount of time that is left after all the necessary everyday deeds, serve fully in favour of children's psychical life, development of their interests and hobbies, searching for new impressions, meeting new friends, and discovering themselves.

The instruction suggested some activities like: watching TV, playing computer games, meeting friends, talking, 'doing nothing', sleeping, shopping, etc. In terms of free time, some of undertaken actions is meant for rest, relax, entertainment, hobbies, but also such activities that would lead to self-improvement and self-placement in the society.

Activities mentioned above can be divided into two groups, as far as their aims are concerned. The first group is about actions undertaken at home, and the other group is about actions in the world outside homes and take place in socio-cultural environment.



To complete the quantity research strategy there had to appear the quality element as well. An important part of this tool was that named 'my comments' where a child was free to note their feelings and remarks. A child's note was a kind of reaction to our request for any child's thought or observation. They were supposed to write about changes that they would like to see in parents' behaviour and also in their own actions, if necessary. What can parents do to make the life rhythm more appropriate for their child?

There was also some space for parents' notes which completed the whole analysis of children's schedule.

The research was conducted in April 2011, so that spring weather would encourage children to enjoy open air activities.

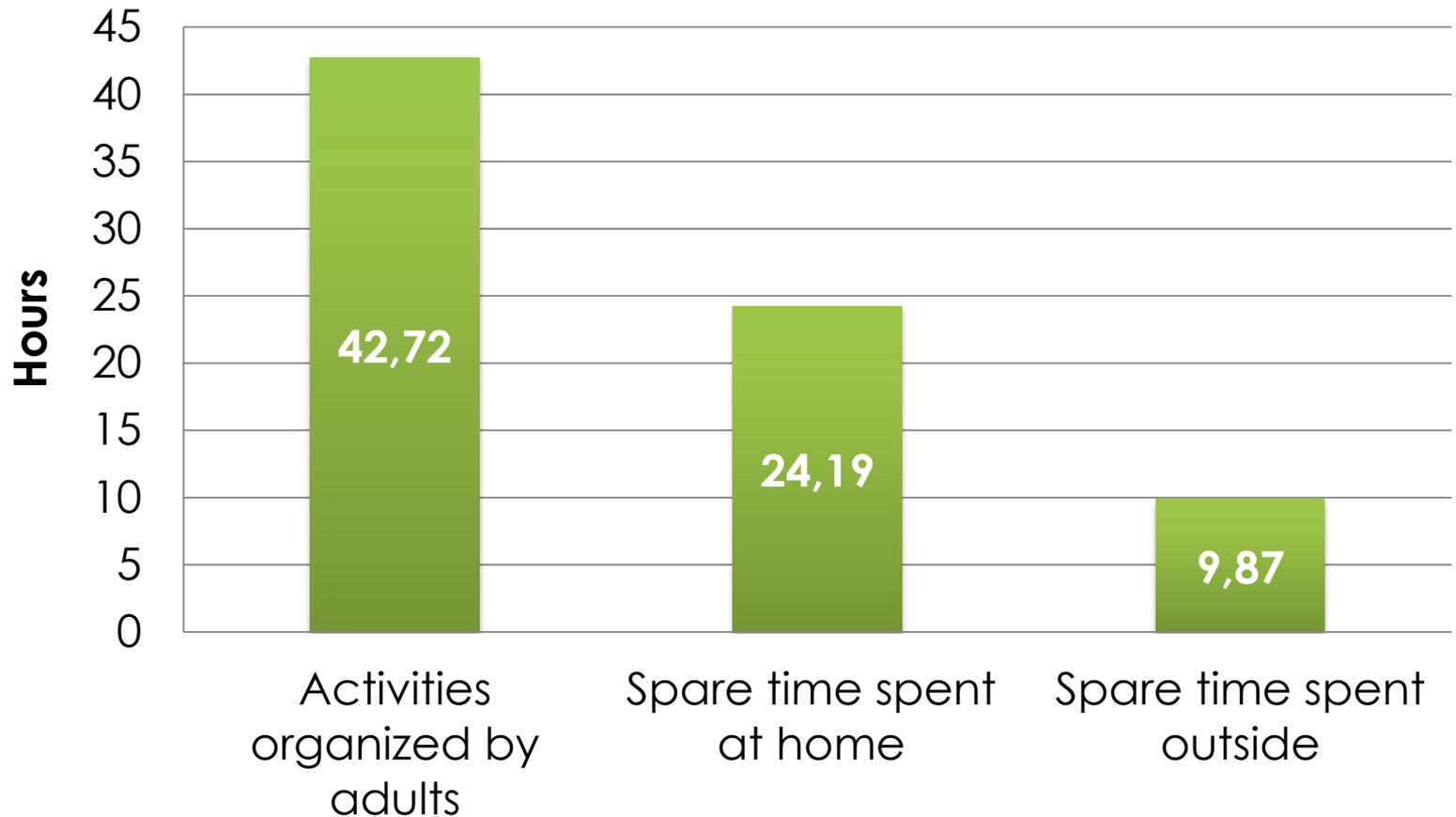


Diagram 1. Average weekly time budget of a primary school pupil.



Analysis of the collected results enables differentiate two unlike pictures of childhood of primary school period, children who are laden over the set limits, and those ones with smaller burden. To the first group belong 64% of all researched children. It is characteristic of its significant burden connected with disproportionate overload with activities arranged by adults. Children in that group spend many hours at school, and after school/and a short break/ they keep learning in many other forms. That includes doing homework and learning at home as well as lot of different kinds of educational activities organized by adults. They are mostly various linguistic classes, private lessons, additional group classes, special activity groups, activities and games developing thinking/e.g. playing chess/, fast reading classes or sports activities also organized by adults/individual and group disciplines/, additional art classes. Those activities take place at school or children after having school finished are driven to another specialist educational centers with wider pallet of lectures and activities.



That picture of activities organized by adults may be completed with time spent in school clubs that also extends children's day at school, and even though such moments have less educating character they in a way limit pupils' free time, too. In cold seasons of the year, a child waiting for their parents in a school club many times must share the place with many other children, and most of the school clubs are not spacious enough. Several surveyed children reasonably postulated that time spent in a school club could be devoted to doing homework in order to have more free time later

//I'd like to find any quiet place in the school club to do homework and don't bother no longer, but it's too loudly!/.

The Ministry of Education noticed the signaled problem and has announced changes in recommendations concerning framework schedule of school clubs; among others an obligatory allocation 20% club time for free children plays.



Proportions between work and education as well as children's play in their school age

In comments of the busiest children's parents appears a clear belief that number of arranged activities is a reasonable and purposeful investing in a child's competence development, and his /her busy life is nothing, but a reason for pride: *'My daughter is full of passion, she works from morning till night'*, *'my son learns four languages, at the beginning he grumbled about Japanese, but now he likes it'*. The datasheet did not have any information on a child's belonging to a particular social class. However, with a high probability we can advance a thesis that group of parents most involved in organizing additional activities were people belonging to Polish middle class. Although such parents are usually so busy and have no free time for themselves, they in natural way invest in their children: go with them to the cinema or theatre, read them books, carry them from one class to another, take them to some interesting places and that all is due to stimulate the development of their children. They do not define that as devotion, but a simple duty.

This tendency was pointed out by M. Biedroń who analyzed the scope and level of parental care within a big city environment. In the researched population, especially the well educated one, a child was overburdened with too many school tasks, and the after-school activities had also educational character. (in:) M. Biedroń, *Funkcja opiekuńcza rodziny wielkomiejskiej*.



Proportions between work and education as well as children's play in their school age

That norm is consistent with known case study by Melvin Kohn/1977/, in which he unambiguously proved that parents' educational styles are in agreement with their social status. Similar relation has been proved/somehow on the other hand / in Polish studies by H. Palska – young, full-grown, high-qualified specialists usually came from families with democratic educational style, high enough material status and clear strong educational tendencies represented by their parents /Palska, 2002, p.88/¹¹. On that ground one can confirm the thesis, demanding but at the same time skillfully supporting parents seem to be a strong generator of future successes. Many researched children, especially pupils of non-public schools, represent consistent picture of parental influence directed to try to get good education by their offspring. Parents in that group treat childhood in a future perspective, it is to prepare a child for functioning and hardworking in coming future, set a child in motion of systematic learning/Łukawska, 1991, p.193/ . Such opinion is arguable, and the research proved that effectively formed regular learning habits both at school and home stay on the same high level in the whole period of education. The habits make a young man take the educational processes without assigning to them any negative connotations/Łukawska, 1999, p.179-180/



Some most hard-working children in their free comments were satisfied with the achieved results: *'I'm in the fifth class now, and I'm working so hard. Sometimes I'm fed up with everything, but I already know it was worth – I have average 5.75. of learning', 'I'm the best in my class'* as well as good time organization enables reconcile education with leisure *'I can do it, I have time on everything'*. There were more negative opinions in that group: *'I don't have any spare time, and I'm constantly exhausted, not to mention about those huge homework', 'no time to play!', 'I wish I could be back from school earlier', 'I'd like to stop going to musical school at last, and go horse-riding everyday', 'Is the Ministry able to shorten lessons and lengthen breaks?'*

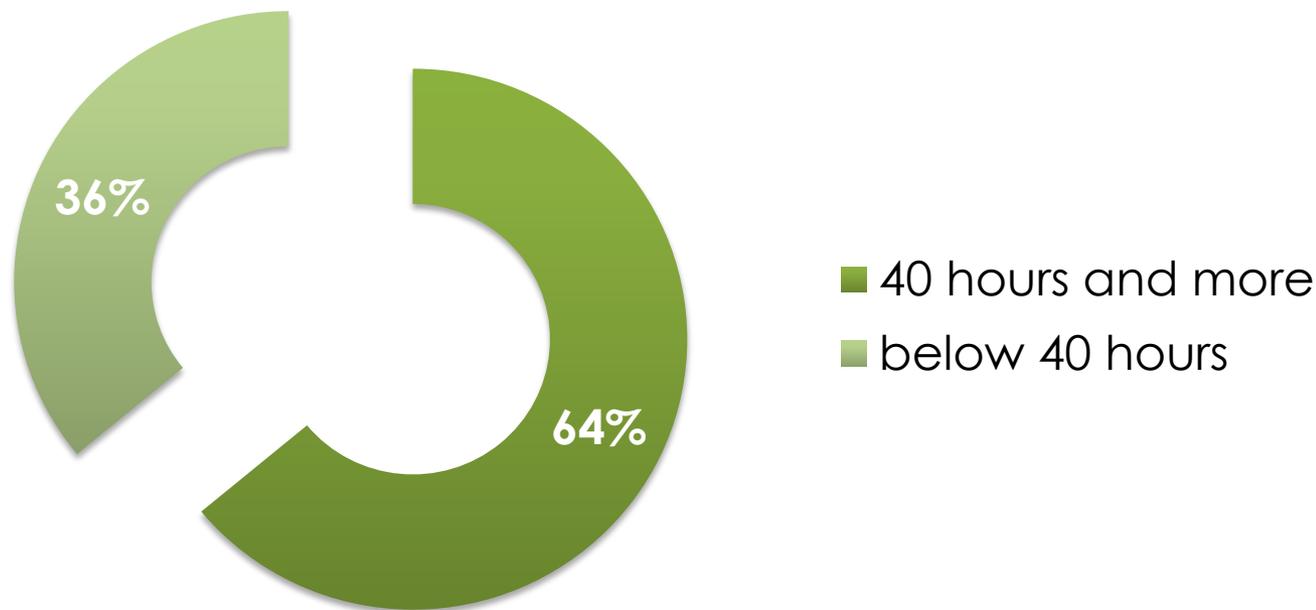


Diagram 2. Percentage arrangement of children according to the length of the activities organized by adults in weekly budget of children's time.



Second group which is smaller/36% of children/ spends less than 40 hours a week participating in activities arranged by adults. In that case children have more free time for themselves. The process of afternoon routine is little structured and in some cases the datasheets come across as random and chaotic. Children from that group/especially the younger ones/ watch more TV, are serial fans, play with toys, play computer games for a longer time. In the same breath, more often than children from the other group, they help at home, play with peers in the backyard or look after siblings. Resourcefulness and creativity in organizing free actions are visible at some children from that group and clearly differ from typical for the previous group kinds of activities: *'building boats from the matches'* /boy, aged 8/, *'baking cookies'* /girl at the age of 11/, *'date with a girl'* /boy, aged 9/. A group of children came from school in a small village where some part of the children's time is surprisingly used by a local Catholic parish. Some of the offered activities were included into those organized by adults/church choir; schola/, and part of them is organized by children themselves/plays and games, meetings in the parish/.



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The hour arrangement of time organized by adults in next years of primary school looks interesting

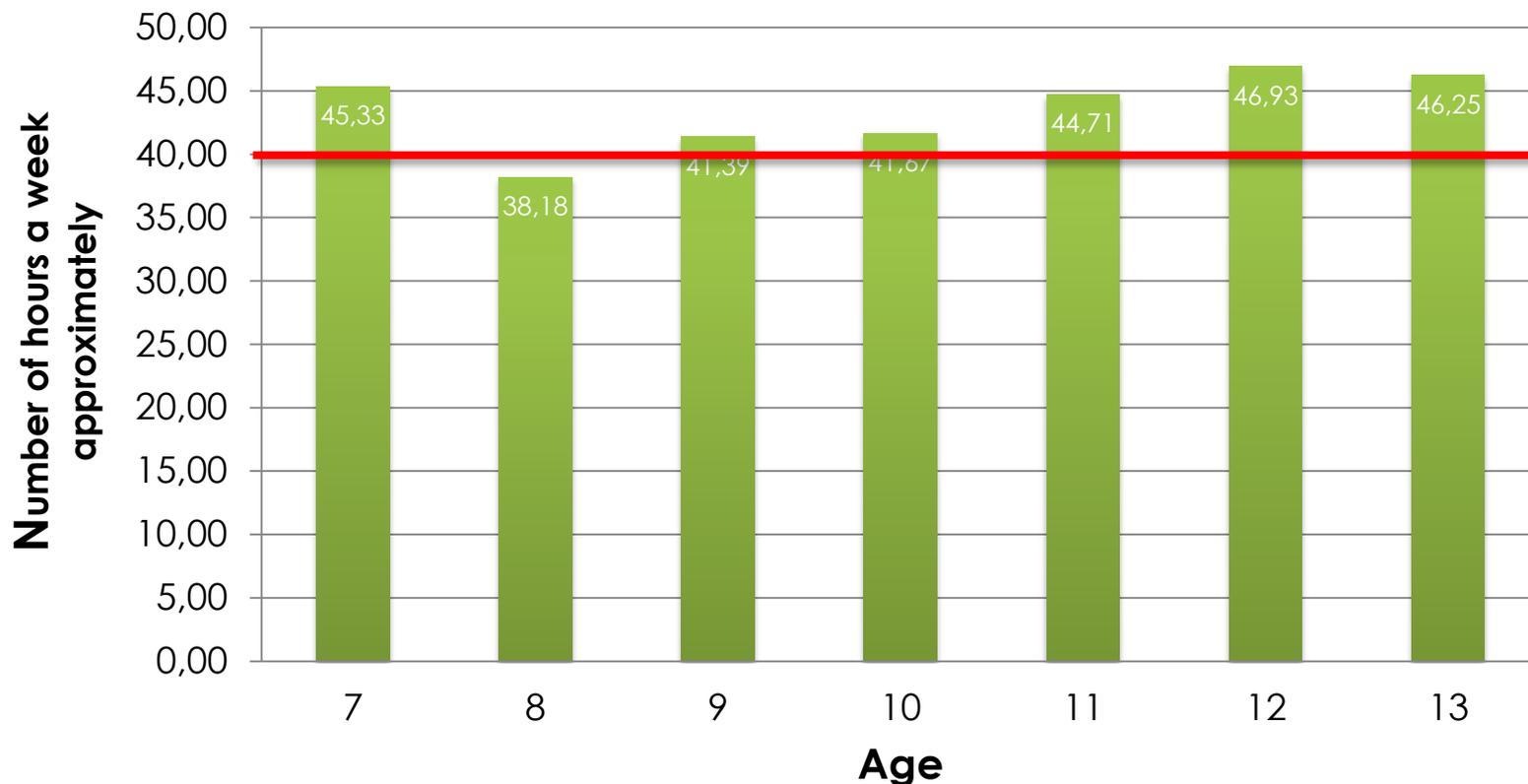


Diagram 3. Number of hours of children's working time in weekly budget according to age.



The red line on the level of forty hours let notice the most laden are children in their first year of school, and next in the fifth and sixth classes of primary school. In case of first-form pupils /children, aged 6-7/ the main reason of a great number of educational activities/at an average 45 hours a week/ is probably parental thirst for a successful debut of their children, intention to derive profit from school educational offer. It may accompany a child's enthusiasm in their active participation in classes. An important influence on that has number of more hours spent in school clubs than it takes place later, till time the parents collect their from school. For the next three years of school, the number of hours spent on activities arranged by adults is a bit lower and oscillates about 40 hours a week. Children effectively do homework and – as you may assume – they cautiously engage themselves into extracurricular activities. It seems that pupils in that period of school career better manage their time budget, and parents favor keeping sensible balance between duties and free time.



Last two years at primary school usually mean intensity of burden in learning and additional activities /49,6 and 46,3 hours a week/. Program contents in the fifth and sixth classes of primary school are said to be more difficult, and school material that must be mastered is more extensive than before, what is more, the perspective of final exam and choosing good junior high increase the pressure that parents and school bring to pupils.



Another research question concerned the time not managed by adults and spent by children, and what actions are the main core of activities when children themselves are designers of free time. The free time rate has been presented on diagram 4. It clearly shows the youngest pupils in their feelings have little time for free disposal. In following years the estimate values given by pupils show that older pupils are able to successively manage the time budget, more and more effectively reconcile education with leisure time. Although educational burden is objectively higher in last classes, the chart does not show the decrease of spare time. The only decreased value concerns the passage from initial teaching to the fourth class.

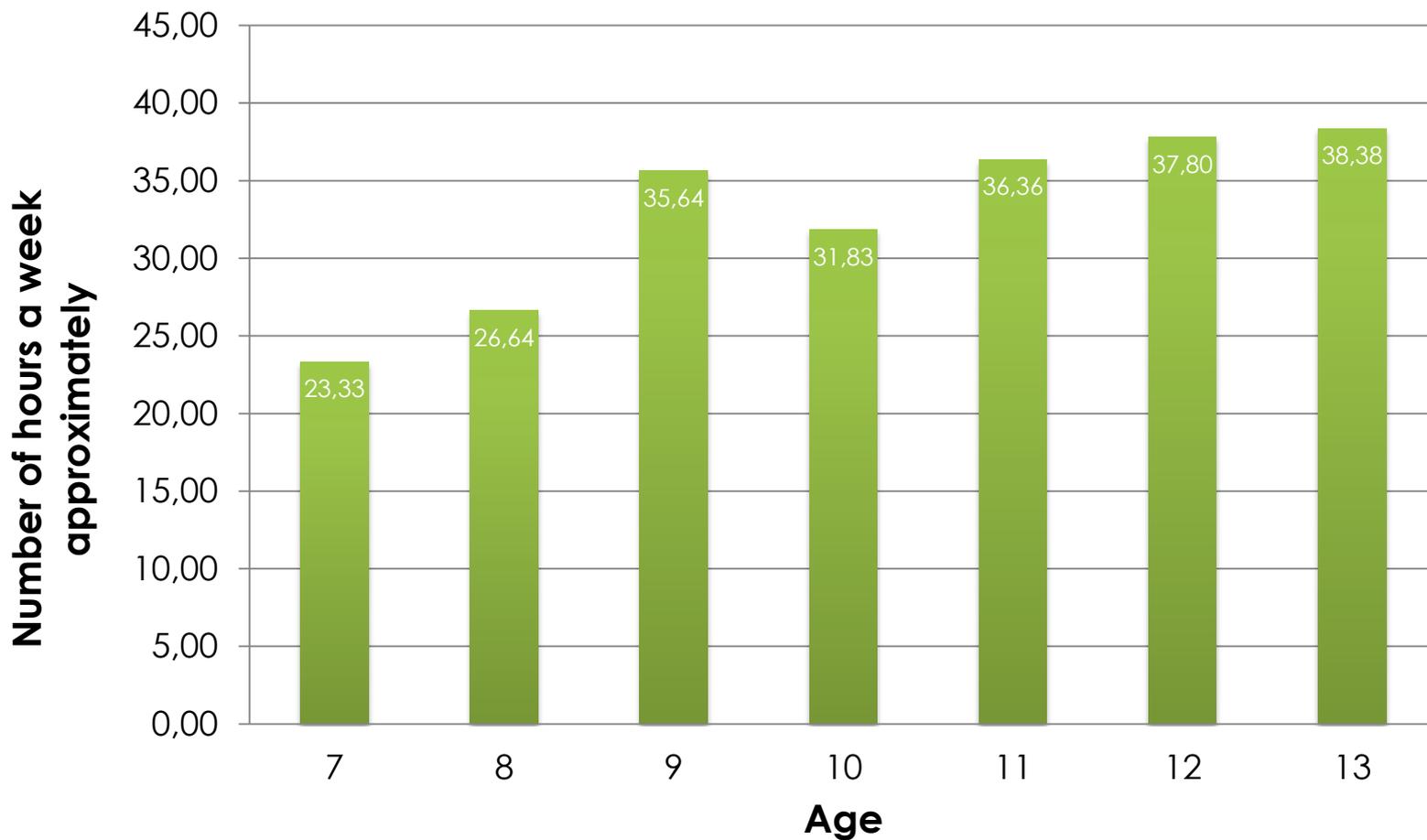


Diagram 4. Average free time values in following years of primary school.

The study showed a pupil spends at home on average 24,19 hours of free time a week and may moderately have it to their disposal. Many statements show that most of parents note rather constant structure of time budget, including permanent elements connected with some duties, but at the same time they give a child a free hand in its creating. To such contents of leisure time, freely arranged by children at home are mostly: watching TV /8,44 hrs a week/ and using computer /7,59hrs a week/. Nearly 2,5 hours a week primary school pupils spend on reading, whereas 1,5 hour is spent on domestic duties, usually it is pet care, looking after younger siblings, tidying own room etc. Almost two hours children spent on chats with other inmates. An average value of another home activities amounted 2,25 hours, and that time especially for younger children consists in having fun/e.g. building bricks, puzzle, putting together models, puppet shows, etc/.



Older children prefer in that time to devote to their hobbies, or develop their interests /e.g. drawing, listening to favorite kind of music/, but also cook or do ironing etc. Children aged, 9/10 stop using in their time budget description the term 'play'. Some of them put in the column a suggested word 'doing-nothing', giving themselves full right not to do any activity. Alarming fact is a small range of time only for oneself and being experienced in values connected with getting bored /e.g. communication on intrapersonal level/.

Time spent at home is contently directed to 'for oneself' in order to fulfill individual and family needs.



Primary school pupil's average time spent in their free time outside amounted nearly 10 hours a week. Children spend about 3 hours a week near home/in the backyard/ among their peers. Meeting relatives and friends take another 3 hours a week/3,18/. Riding a bike, skateboarding, rollerblading amounts about 0,73 hour a week, especially older children spend 0,77 hour a week on shopping and going to the malls. More than 2 hours a week children spend time in more various way, going to church /Sunday mass/, going for walks with family or friends /e.g. ZOO, museum/, participating in sports events / motor shows/, and cultural ones/e.g. theatrical shows, philharmonic/. The contents of activities taking place in that time clearly show moving out the recreational character of spending time outside and its obviously socializing function.



The research confirms thesis that a great number of Polish pupils work in higher than 40-hour time budget/legally guaranteed to adults/. However, in many households rational time managed by adults, the rhythm of daily structure adjusted to a child's needs – effectively compensates the intensity of their activity. Children in that group take their burden as something natural and are able to cope with them. In case of the lack of daily structure worked out by a child or parents there appear many comments on tiredness and longing for leisure time, so further research and some parents' education in a time budget management of a child is recommended.



Two periods of a child functioning should be taken into account – child as a primary school pupil when daily rhythm management seems to be at risk of negative burden results. First of them appears at the beginning of school, in the first class, when children are laden with many hours of school educations as well as additional activities. In their own feelings they have little free time for themselves. Second difficult moment comes at the beginning of the fourth class, while moving from initial classes to next level of school education.



Weekly time budget was a picture of daily routines, duties and pressures that children were subjected to. According to the basic theses, arguable from point of view of watched reality, and some studies, appeared the picture of childhood from which you require many hours of hardworking every day. Educating areas are treated by adults with priority and recognized as those ones most wanted for further career. Parents who together with children work out efficient framework structures in the rhythm of everyday duties, enable its good functioning and deriving satisfaction from hardworking fruit. Lack of ability in time budget management means for a child a greater chaos which result, by relatively smaller burdens, is tiredness and feeling of overburden. It seems that family support in efficient time management is becoming a crucial task in the age of time deficit and permanent rush.



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