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The degree of the Internet addiction and the psycho-social functioning of young people

Stopień uzależnienia od internetu a funkcjonowanie psychospołeczne młodzieży

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Abstract

Introduction: An excess of time devoted to the use of the Internet may cause negative consequences in the mental, physical and social spheres. Psychosocial functioning of youth has a significant role in the regulation of relations with the environment. Deficits in the area of social behavior and interaction with the environment can lead to social isolation and addictions, which addiction to the Internet has an increasing tendency.

Aim: To determine the relationship between the psychosocial functioning of young people and the degree of Internet addiction.

Material and methods: The surveyed group consisted of 263 respondents. 52.1% were junior high school students, and 47.9% high school. The average age in the group was 15.4 (\pm 1.4). Almost 25.1% were boys, and 74.9% girls. Among the respondents, 58.9% came from the village, and 41.1% from the city. The data collection was based on the standardized Kimberly Young Test, assessing the degree of Internet addiction and the author's questionnaire regarding the psychosocial functioning assessment.

Results: About 39.3% of students addicted to the Internet admitted that they do not have a large group of friends on whom they can rely. 25% of people addicted to the Internet and 31.6% of the addiction risk group reported difficulties in making new acquaintances. Frequent conflicts with friends were reported by 42.9% of students addicted to the Internet and 31.6% from the risk group. Low self-esteem was felt by as many as 64.3% of addicted students and 42.1% of addiction risk groups. Learning difficulties were reported by as many as 57.1% of the youth addicted to the network.

Conclusions: The research results show that in the group of students addicted to the Internet, problems such as difficulties in making new acquaintances, frequent conflicts with peers, lower self-esteem and learning difficulties occurred more often than in people at risk.

Key words: Internet, addiction, youth, psychosocial functioning

Introduction

The Internet is known throughout the world as the primary source of information, marketing and entertainment. It offers a lot of communication and learning opportunities, especially for young people, for whom using the Internet is everyday [1]. Ease of access, universality and the innumerable possibilities of the Internet lead to excessive use from the network. This phenomenon is increasingly observed among young people and can lead to the emergence of Internet addiction. The Internet network determines the functioning of the young generation. Youth have the possibility of internet communication in every place: at school, home, library, cafe, on the street and in many other places, wherever there is the possibility of a network connection, for example through a tablet, telephone, computer. As a result, there are often abuses leading to malicious use of the Internet. Excess of time devoted to the use of the Internet may cause negative consequences in the mental, physical and social spheres. The negative effects of the Internet abuse observed especially among young people include difficulties in

establishing contacts with other people, the individual becomes lonely and socially isolated [2]. Long-term staying in the Internet reality leads to the impoverishment of the dictionary and excessive use of verbal abbreviations [3,4]. All kinds of values valued in the real world disappear, such as patriotism or Christian values, which are being replaced by trends prevailing on the Internet. It comes to fascination with the new lifestyle and thoughtless takeover of fashion propagated on websites. Abuse of the Internet can also manifest itself in the form of problems at school or at work. Chronic fatigue, problems with concentration lead to difficulties in learning and inefficacy of the actions taken. This is a barrier for the individual in achieving high results in these areas.

Purpose of research

The aim of the study was to determine the relationship between the psychosocial functioning of youth and the meltdown of Internet addiction.

Material and methods

The research was carried out by means of a diagnostic survey using the survey technique. The research tool was a standardized Kimberly Young test, assessing the degree of Internet addiction. The questionnaire consists of 8 statements to which the examined person answers YES or NO. The test results indicated an adequate degree of Internet addiction. The research used the author's questionnaire, which included questions about the psychosocial functioning of the subjects. The questionnaire contained 29 questions, which included: demographic data, psychosocial functioning and Internet-related behavior of the examined persons. The research was carried out from April to June 2018. at schools in Lublin, Łaszczów and Nabroź. The selection criterion for the study group was informed consent for participation in the study and age (13-20 years). The approval of the Bioethics Committee at the Medical University in Lublin, no. KE-0254/93/2018, was obtained for conducting these tests. StatSoft Statistica 13 PL and Microsoft Office package were used for statistical analysis. Interrelation between the groups were determined by the Pearson Chi square test, Mann – Whitney U test and Kruskal - Wallis test, accepted at $p < 0.05$.

Results

Among the respondents ($n = 263$), 52% were middle school students and 48% were upper secondary school students. Almost 75% of respondents are girls, and the remaining 25% boys.

Nearly 41% of students were urban residents, while 59% were from rural areas. The average age of respondents was 15.4 (\pm 1.4) years.

The Kimberly Young test showed that 10.6% of respondents were addicted to the Internet, while in 7.2% there was a risk of addiction. Twice more often the addiction to the network occurred among junior high school students (13.9%) than high school (7.1%). Likewise, rural residents rather than cities were more often addicted to the Internet (12.9% vs. 7.4%).

The risk of Internet addiction occurred in 7.2% of students. This group included 12.1% boys and 5.6% girls and 7.1% high school students and 7.3% junior high school students. Almost twice as many people from the Internet addiction risk group came from the city than from the village (10.2% vs. 5.2%).

There were no significant statistical correlations between the results of the Internet addiction test and gender, the type of school and place of residence ($p > 0.05$). The exact results are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Degree of Internet addiction and selected socio-demographic features

Young test Level of addiction		Togethe r	Sex		School		Place of residence	
			Male	Female	Junior high school	High school	City	Countrysid e
No addiction (\leq 3 pkt)	n	216	50	166	108	108	89	127
	%	82.1%	75.8%	84.3%	78.8%	85.7%	82.4%	81.9%
Risk (4 pkt)	n	19	8	11	10	9	11	8
	%	7.2%	12.1%	5.6%	7.3%	7.1%	10.2%	5.2%
Internet Addiction (\geq 5 pkt)	n	28	8	20	19	9	8	20
	%	10.6%	12.1%	10.2%	13.9%	7.1%	7.4%	12.9%
altogethe r	n	263	66	197	137	126	108	155
Stat. Chi², "p"	-		p = 0,17031		p = 0,20500		p = 0,13324	

25% of people addicted to the Internet and 31.6% of the addiction risk group reported difficulties in making new acquaintances. In non-addicted pupils, this problem occurred only in 19%.

About 39.3% of Internet addicts admitted that they do not have a large group of friends they can rely on. A similar response was given by 26.3% of people from the addiction risk group and 22.2% not dependent on the Internet. Detailed information on this subject is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Interpersonal relationships and Internet addiction

Do you have difficulty making new friends?		Together	The result of the Young test			
			No addiction	Risk	Internet Addiction	
yes	n	54	41	6	7	
	%	20.5%	19.0%	31.6%	25.0%	
no	n	209	175	13	21	
	%	79.5%	81.0%	68.4%	75.0%	
Altogether		n	263	216	19	28
Stat. Chi ² , "p"		-	p = 0,35312			
Do you have a lot of friends you can count on?		Together	The result of the Young test			
			No addiction	Risk	Internet Addiction	
yes	n	199	168	14	17	
	%	75.7%	77.8%	73.7%	60.7%	
no	n	64	48	5	11	
	%	24.3%	22.2%	26.3%	39.3%	
Altogether		n	263	216	19	28
Stat. Chi ² , "p"		-	p = 0,13785			

A statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) was found between the results of the Internet addiction test and conflicts with peers. Frequent conflicts with friends were reported by 42.9% of students addicted to the Internet and 31.6% from the risk group and 21.8% from non-addicted people.

28.6% of people addicted to the Internet, 10.5% of the risk group and 13.9% of non-addicted people, did not feel the acceptance of their peers.

A statistically significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) was found between the degree of Internet addiction and the feeling of "being inferior" to others. The low self-esteem was indicated by as many as 64.3% of people addicted to the Internet and 42.1% from the risk group. On the other hand, respondents not dependent on the Internet in 71.3% did not have a sense of lower value (Table 3).

Table 3. Functioning in the peer group and dependence on the Internet

Do you have conflicts with your colleagues?		Together	The result of the Young test			
			No addiction	Risk	Internet	
yes	n	65	47	6	12	
	%	24.7%	21.8%	31.6%	42.9%	
no	n	198	169	13	16	
	%	75.3%	78.2%	68.4%	57.1%	
Altogether		n	263	216	19	28
Stat. Chi ² , "p"		-	p = 0,03979			
Do you feel accepted by peers?		Together	The result of the Young test			
			No addiction	Risk	No addiction	
yes	n	223	186	17	20	
	%	84.8%	86.1%	89.5%	71.4%	
no	n	40	30	2	8	
	%	15.2%	13.9%	10.5%	28.6%	
Altogether		n	263	216	19	28
Stat. Chi ² , "p"		-	p = 0,10583			
Do you feel that you are worse than others?		Together	The result of the Young test			
			No addiction	Risk	No addiction	
yes	n	88	62	8	18	
	%	33.5%	28.7%	42.1%	64.3%	
no	n	175	154	11	10	
	%	66.5%	71.3%	57.9%	35.7%	
Altogether		n	263	216	19	28
Stat. Chi ² , "p"		-	p = 0,00062			

There was a statistical dependence ($p < 0.05$) between the results of the Young test and the occurrence of learning problems. Over half (57.1%) of Internet addicted students and 26.3% of people with addiction risk admitted having learning problems. Persons not dependent on the Internet declared in 80.6% of cases that they did not have learning difficulties.

Discussion

With the emergence of the phenomenon of Internet addiction, literature tries to explain the factors that influence the development of this addiction. There were many theories on this subject, such as: neurobiological concept [16], Caplan's social skills deficit theory or Davis's cognitive-behavioral concept [3; 5]. The reasons for Internet addiction are also found in genetics. The genes responsible for the dopamine transmission are considered to be the development of addiction [6]. According to some authors, the reasons for Internet addiction can be divided into internal and external factors. The internal factors include problems with one's personality, reactions and specific behaviors of the individual caused by various events or periods in life, e.g. the period of puberty. The external factors are: family situation, relations with peers or the situation at school [7].

The research shows that temperament largely affects the development of Internet addiction [3]. Personality traits that characterize people who are particularly vulnerable to this type of addiction are: shyness, sensitivity to criticism, uncertainty, nervousness, pessimism and self-centeredness. These people are characterized by exaggerated attention to trivial things, lack of resistance to criticism, low self-esteem, lack of specific goals and plans for life. These people often cut themselves off from living in society, choosing loneliness and losing themselves in the online reality.

According to Cierpiałkowska [3], the groups with a passive-aggressive personality and a dependent personality belong to the group that is particularly at risk of Internet addiction. The first group is characterized by a negative attitude towards others, aggressive behaviors for no particular reason, inability to show feelings even to people in the immediate environment, uncritical attitude towards oneself and recklessness in action, while avoiding any responsibility. Dependent personality is characterized by a high level of social anxiety, fear of making contacts in reality, and at the same time a strong need to make them. The individual seeks to be appreciated, by which he submits to other people, his norms and principles, all to become accepted and avoid rejection [3].

Kaliszewska [2] considers the high level of social anxiety to be the cause of the phenomenon of excessive use of the Internet. In her opinion, people who are shy, addicted to the Internet are

shy, showing self-confidence and avoiding interpersonal contacts [2]. This was reflected in the results of own research, in which 28.6% did not feel accepted by their colleagues and nearly 43% of students addicted to the Internet reported frequent conflicts with their peers. 25% of addicts and 31.6% of students from addiction risk group found it difficult to make new acquaintances.

The factors of the school environment are also significant. These factors include school policy, the way the curriculum is implemented, teachers' attitude towards the problem of excessive Internet use by students. It should be noted that there is little or no emphasis on the prevention of Internet addiction in schools. The problem is often neglected, and its development may be caused by frequent mismatch of the requirements of the educational program conducted by the teacher to the student's needs, rigid adherence to rules, lack of appropriate teacher qualifications and poor student - school relationship [8]. It all makes the child isolate and withdraw from school life. He treats participation in lessons as an unpleasant duty, he loses interest in the program he accomplishes, he abandons his studies while spending more and more time on the Internet.

Another important issue is the feeling of low value, shyness or the occurrence of depressive symptoms and learning difficulties that can significantly affect the development of Internet addiction [2,9,10,11,12]. According to Janocha et al. [13], long hours of staying in the network can lead to depression. Attention was also paid to the fact that women are more often exposed to depressive disorders associated with Internet abuse than men. In own research, as many as 64.3% of students addicted to the Internet and 42.1% of the addiction risk group declared that they often feel worse than others. Low self-esteem was more often accompanied by girls than boys (35.5% vs. 27.3%). 57.1% of students addicted to the Internet and 26.3% of the risk group reported learning problems. Taking into account gender, boys reported problems more often than girls (30.3% vs. 21.8%).

The problem of Internet abuse is becoming a common phenomenon among school students. The frightening fact is that many students are at risk of developing Internet addiction, and the number of addicts is constantly growing. The obtained results inform that many factors influence the degree of Internet addiction, ie psychosocial functioning, self-esteem, willingness to be understood and accepted by the family and peers [14,15]. This situation requires undertaking corrective actions of an educational nature addressed to the youngest Internet users. The scope of education should relate to the negative effects of excessive Internet use and benefits resulting from skillful use of the network and should include both pupils of junior grades (I-III) and older primary school.

Conclusions

The research results show that in the group of students addicted to the Internet, problems such as difficulties in making new acquaintances, frequent conflicts with peers, lower self-esteem and learning difficulties occurred more often than in people at risk. There is a need to intensify promotional and educational activities concerning young people exposed to the development of Internet addiction and their carers.

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