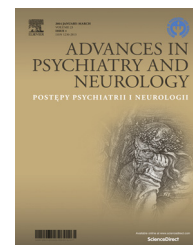


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Problematic Internet use and intrapersonal and interpersonal attitudes in adolescents

Problematyczne użytkowanie Internetu a nastawienia intrapersonalne i interpersonalne u młodzieży

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ABSTRACT

Aims: The aim of this paper is to look for connections between self-esteem, interpersonal relations, the world and life image and the intensification of problematic Internet use, taking into consideration differences resulting from gender. Another aim is to determine predictors connected with problematic Internet use in the group of female and male youth. 270 high-school students were initially examined; however, further analysis covered 260 of them, i.e. 142 females and 118 males. **Methods:** *The Problematic Internet Use Test (Test Problematycznego Używania Internetu; TPUI22)* and the *Questionnaire of Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Attitudes and Attitudes Towards the World (Kwestionariusz Nastawień Intrapersonalnych, Interpersonalnych i Nastawień wobec Świata; KNIIS)*. **Results:** On the basis of the conducted analyses, statistically significant differences were found in the scope of self-esteem, convictions about intrapersonal relations and the experience of the world and life in persons with various intensification of problematic Internet use. Furthermore, different predictors were found in terms of addictive use of the Internet in the groups of female and male students. Thus, for female students it was self-esteem in the field of character, and for male students it was the self-esteem in the social and moral sphere. There were no inter-gender differences in terms of problematic Internet use or the number of hours spent online weekly. **Conclusions:** The obtained results are in line with the previous reports from other studies on the problematic Internet use. Furthermore, they broaden this viewpoint with a possible new variables connected with this type of addictive behaviour. They also point to possible determinants of problematic Internet use in the group of high-school students. Therefore, they can contribute to

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a better understanding of causes for this type of behaviour in this age group. There is also hope that the obtained results will contribute to a more effective planning of preventive treatment aimed at high-school students.

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Introduction

The last decades have been abundant in development of new technologies, which have contributed to improvements in the life of an average human being. One of them is the Internet which gives its users, mainly the youth, access to various kinds of information and services. Young people can use it to stay in touch with others, play online games, post various contents (pictures, films, etc.) as well as search for information they are interested in. Young people use the Internet not only for the purposes of work, school learning, developing their interests and hobbies, but also for entertainment. However, despite the benefits the Internet brings, there is more and more data regarding the problems and damages that may be caused by the abuse of the Internet [1]. Long hours spent in front of a computer screen may cause, among others, dysfunctions within social skills, followed by diminishment of time devoted to family or other activities in the real world [2]. Among those who are particularly exposed to Internet addiction are lonely people, children and adolescents for whom the Internet is a constant part of their everyday functioning [3, 4], most frequently connected with work or entertainment. It should be remembered that the study of the Centre for Public Opinion Research (Polish: CBOS) conducted in the Polish population showed that 2.5% of the population, i.e. 750,000 people, are exposed to the risk of Internet addiction. On the other hand, 0.3% of the subjects, i.e. 100,000 people, suffered from the Internet addiction. Two thirds of those exposed to the risk of addiction are children and youth up to 25 years of age, where 10.4% constitute people under 18, and 6% are aged between 18 and 24 [5]. According to the study conducted in Italy, 4.7% of students between 14 and 18 years of age presented symptoms suggesting the Internet addiction [6].

Numerous researchers and therapists have been undertaking attempts to define unequivocally the diagnostic criteria for the Internet addiction [7]. According to Young [8], pathological use of the Internet is a *disturbance of habits control which does not cause intoxication, however, significantly and clearly downgrades human functioning in all the spheres of human life*. Moreover, she also suggested eight areas for auto-diagnosis [9]. The criteria of pathological Internet use were developed on the basis of the pathological gambling syndrome included in the DSM-IV classification. This disorder is diagnosed when 5 out of 8 symptoms appeared last year, i.e. (1) preoccupation with the Internet which is manifested with a consistent thinking about being online; (2) the need to spend an increasing amount of time online in order to get the amount of excitement one is looking for; (3) recurring but unsuccessful attempts to control one's own use of the Internet; (4) the presence of strong negative

feelings in the situation when staying online is limited, such as dejection, irritability, etc.; (5) problems with organising the time spent online; (6) stress, personal and social problems resulting from using the Internet; (7) manipulation in relations with the surrounding world which is aimed at hiding the information about one's own involvement in the Internet; (8) emotional regulation with the use of the Internet, which transforms into an escape from problems and a relief of negative emotions [10].

The attempts to develop the diagnostic criteria for the Internet addiction were also undertaken by the following authors: Beard and Wolf [11] and Griffith [12]. In Poland, this subject was undertaken by e.g. Bohdan Woronowicz, who based his research on the DSM-IV and ICD-10 classifications [13]. It should be stressed that according to DSM-IV and DSM-IV-TR classification, the term 'addiction' is used in relation to chemical substances [14, 15]. However, despite the fact that the 5th revision of DSM does not include the addiction to the Internet as a separate nosological unit, the Internet gaming disorder was included in Section III [16]. According to Davis, in the field of the discussed issues, the term 'pathological' or 'dysfunctional' use of the Internet should be used [17]. Referring to the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems 10th revision, the problem of addiction – dysfunctional Internet use is often classified throughout the analogy with pathological gambling as is included in the section of "Habit and impulse disorders" as well as in "Obsessive-compulsive disorders" [18]. For the purposes of this paper, the terms of Internet addiction, pathological, problematic, dysfunctional and addictive use of the web will be used interchangeably.

It should also be emphasised that persons addicted to the Internet more frequently experience the symptoms of depression and suicidal thoughts [19]. Guo et al. [20] observed that people, who use the Internet excessively, present an increased risk of depressive disorders. Furthermore, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression, social phobias and hostility may contribute to the increase of the risk of Internet addiction in males. In females, ADHD may be a similar factor [21, 22]. On the other hand, Liu et al. [23] observed a correlation between the Internet addiction and the psychoactive substances dependence, depression and the level of aggression in females. Bakken et al. [24] point out to the occurrence of sleeping problems in the group of people with this type of addiction.

It should also be stressed that the problematic Internet use syndrome creates various controversies and problems to be faced by both researchers and therapists. One of them is whether the problematic Internet use is a temporary issue in the functioning and life of a person, which is related to fascination with new technology or a permanent behavioural disorder [1, 25]. Another controversy is whether it is

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