Prevalence of Problematic Mobile Phone Use in British Adolescents

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## Sample

A non-random sample of 1,026 secondary school pupils aged between 11 and 18 years. The pupils were from public (state) and private schools in different London boroughs, covering both
mixed and single-sex education.

# Abstract

The problematic use of mobile phones among adolescents has not been widely studied. There are very few instruments for assessing potential technological addiction to mobile phones, or for categorizing different types of users or uses. The most widely used scale is the Mobile Phone Problem Use Scale (MPPUS), which is used to study adult populations, and has been applied in various forms in international contexts. The aims of this study were to adapt the Spanish version of this scale (MPPUSA) to British adolescents, and then to estimate the prevalence of possible problematic users. A questionnaire was administered to a sample of 1,529 secondary school pupils aged between 11 and 18 years, with 1,026 completed questionnaires being collected. The analysis showed that the factor and construct validity and reliability were comparable to those obtained in previous studies. The prevalence of problematic users among the students was 10%, and the typical problematic user tended to be an adolescent between 11 and 14 years old, studying in a public school, who considered themselves to be an expert user of this technology, who made extensive use of his/her mobile phone, and who attributed the same problem of use among their peers. These users presented notable scores in all the symptoms covered by the scale used to assess problematic use. In conclusion, the adaptation of the MPPUSA as a screening scale for British adolescents presents good sensitivity and specificity for detecting the main addictive symptoms proposed in this validated version.

# Outcome

The prevalence of problematic users among the students was 10%, the most relevant symptom was withdrawal (reporting experiencing unpleasant emotions when unable to use the mobile phone as
usual). The greater the level of problematic use, the more likely the adolescent is to notice the same problem among peers. "The use of mobile phones seems to be an intrinsic part of young people’s lives, one that is reinforced through the self- and social gratification it provides,41,42 and which also enables young people to manage their own emotions and behavior.20,22,24 Given the current availability of Internet-enabled mobile phones as tools for communication and entertainment among adolescents, research is needed that addresses the use of these smartphones, which may
lead to more use overall,43 as well as to addictive behaviors that can be associated with problematic use." (Lopez-Fernandez, 2014: 7).