The digital divide: Risk and protective factors and the differences in problematic use of digital devices among Hungarian youth

# Details

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249 Hungarian youth between the age of 14 and 28

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Parenting guidance / support

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# Abstract

A number of psychological factors have been found to be relevant in terms of problematic use of digital devices. Some of them may serve as risk factors, while others mean protection. The main goal of present study was to determine user profiles and to examine differences among them based on several psychological variables using cluster analysis. Data were collected from high school and university students via an online questionnaire from November 2017 to January 2018 (N = 249; females: 62.2%, Mean age = 22.5 years, SD = 3.5). Based on bivariate correlations, sensation seeking, flow and boredom proneness acted as risk factors for developing problematic technological use. However, self-esteem, self-regulation and resilience were significant protective factors against problematic technological use. In an effort to develop a set of profiles that would capture this student population and their usage relative to risk, we identified four distinct user profiles through the use of cluster analysis. The first cluster was labeled as strongly protected sensation-seekers who were more prone to problematic use (18.5%) with moderately high levels of protection, but with the highest scores on the boredom proneness and sensation seeking scales. The second cluster consisted of more balanced and non-vulnerable users (26.1%), who achieved average scores on both risk and protective factors scales. The third cluster was labeled protected, conscious users who were slightly prone to problematic use (39.8%) with lower levels of problematic use and risk factors, and with higher levels of protective factors. The fourth cluster was labeled as strongly
problematic, unprotected users (15.7%), who achieved the highest scores of problematic use, and were the less protected having the lowest levels of protective factors scores. We conclude that cluster analysis was suitable for detecting differences in vulnerability to problematic Internet and smartphone use. Psychological factors, such as sensation seeking, flow and boredom, self-esteem, self-regulation and resilience serve as useful tools for providing information to better understanding the role of risk and protective factors in the prevention of youth’s problematic use of digital devices.

# Outcome

During the research authors aimed to differentiate specific user groups in relation to risk and psychological factors with K-means cluster analysis. According to the results the biggest cluster (40%) was characterized with moderate level of risk and did not really use the internet for sensation seeking. 26% belonged to the non-vulnerable group who scored low on the problematic use scale. 18% belonged to the somehow protected but sensation seeking group. Finally, 16% fell into the very problematic and non-protected group of users. Problematic internet use showed correlation with psychological risk factors, and sensation seeking seemed to be a very important in developing problematic behavior, so as boredom, while high self-esteem and self-regulation were important protective factors.
'In summary, our work provides clear evidence of the protective role of self-esteem, self-regulation and resilience, and the fact that sensation seeking, boredom proneness and flow are significant risk factors for developing problematic Internet and smartphone use. These results also support the applicability of cluster analysis in detecting levels of vulnerability for the most potential problematic users of youth compared to those who seem protected.' (Kiss et al.: The digital divide: Risk and protective factors and the differences in problematic use of digital devices among Hungarian youth, Children and Youth Services Review Volume 108, January 2020, 104612)