The impact of digital media on health: children’s perspectives

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## Authors

Smahel D.;Wright M.;Cernikova M.

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## Topics

* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Wellbeing
* Risks and harms
* Digital and socio-cultural environment

## Sample

children between the ages of 9 and 16 in 9 European countries (N = 368)

## Implications For Parents About

## Implications For Educators About

Other

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Creating a safe environment for children online

# Abstract

Objectives:
Previous research has mainly focused on the effects of excessive digital media use or overuse on the health of children, primarily utilizing quantitative designs. More research should be conducted on general populations of children, rather than focusing exclusively on excessive technology users. This qualitative study describes technology’s impact on physical and mental health from children’s perspectives.

Methods:
Focus groups and interviews were conducted with children between the ages of 9 and 16 in 9 European countries (N = 368). During focus groups and interviews, researchers asked what children perceive as being potentially negative or problematic while using the internet and technology.

Results:
In this study, children reported several physical and mental health problems without indicating internet addiction or overuse. Physical health symptoms included eye problems, headaches, not eating, and tiredness. For mental health symptoms, children reported cognitive salience of online events, aggression, and sleeping problems. Sometimes they reported these problems within 30 min of technology usage. This suggests that even shorter time usage can cause self-reported health problems for some children.

Conclusions:
Qualitative methodology helps to understand what children’s perspectives are concerning the impact of digital media on health. We recommend future studies focused on average technology users and low technology users to determine whether average levels of technology usage relate to health problems of children. Parents and teachers should also be informed about the possible physical and mental health issues associated with children's average usage of technology.

# Outcome

"In this study, children reported several physical and mental health problems without indicating internet addiction or overuse. Physical health symptoms included eye problems, headaches, not eating, and tiredness. For mental health symptoms, children reported cognitive salience of online events, aggression, and sleeping problems. Sometimes they reported these problems within 30 min of technology usage. This suggests that even shorter time usage can cause self-reported health problems for some children." (Smahel et al., 2015, pp. 131)