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PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PROTECTING ADOLESCENTS FROM INTERNET ADDICTION

Akmanova Kamila Baxtiyor qizi

Tashkent University of Applied Sciences

Email: akmanovakomila0109@gmail.com

Abstract. This article examines the psychological characteristics of protecting adolescents from internet addiction. The author analyses the concept and types of internet addiction, the psychological factors of its formation in adolescence, and the levels of prevention. The findings are presented through tables, diagrams and schemes. On the basis of the analysis, practical recommendations are developed for preventing internet addiction at the family, school and individual levels.

Key words: internet addiction, adolescent, psychological prevention, digital literacy, self-regulation, family relations.

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются психологические особенности защиты подростков от интернет-зависимости. Автор анализирует понятие и виды интернет-зависимости, психологические факторы её формирования в подростковом возрасте, а также уровни профилактики. На основе анализа предложены практические рекомендации по предупреждению интернет-зависимости в семье, школе и на индивидуальном уровне.

Ключевые слова: интернет-зависимость, подросток, психологическая профилактика, цифровая грамотность, саморегуляция.

Annotatsiya. Mazkur maqolada o‘smirlarni internet addiksiyasidan saqlashning psixologik xususiyatlari tadqiq etilgan. Muallif internet addiksiyasi tushunchasi va turlarini, uning o‘smirlik yoshida shakllanishining psixologik omillarini hamda profilaktika darajalarini tahlil qiladi. Tahlil asosida oila, maktab va shaxs darajasida addiksiyaning oldini olish bo‘yicha amaliy tavsiyalar ishlab chiqilgan.

Kalit so‘zlar: internet addiksiyasi, o‘smir, psixologik profilaktika, raqamli savodxonlik, o‘z-o‘zini boshqarish.

Introduction

The rapid development of digital technologies has made it almost impossible to imagine the life of a modern adolescent without the internet. While the internet offers wide opportunities for education, communication and leisure, its uncontrolled and excessive use leads to a new type of behavioural disorder — internet addiction (psychological dependence on the internet). This phenomenon is especially dangerous during adolescence, the most sensitive stage of personality formation.

The relevance of the problem is reflected in statistical data. According to a meta-analysis covering 64 countries, the average global prevalence of internet addiction is 14.22 per cent, while smartphone dependence reaches 26.99 per cent. According to estimates by the World Health Organization, approximately 14 per cent of adolescents aged 10–19 experience one or another

mental disorder, and part of these are directly related to digital dependence. Therefore, studying the psychological characteristics of protecting adolescents from internet addiction is of considerable theoretical and practical importance.

The aim of this article is to analyse the psychological essence and factors of internet addiction in adolescents and to substantiate the psychological measures for its prevention. The study employed theoretical analysis, the synthesis of scientific sources, and a comparative approach.

The concept and types of internet addiction

The term "internet addiction" was first introduced into scientific use in 1996 by the American psychologist Kimberly Young. She defined this condition as a behavioural disorder characterised by a person's inability to control their internet use, spending excessive time in the virtual space, and the resulting negative impact on daily life. Today, "gaming disorder" has been included as an official diagnosis in the World Health Organization's ICD-11 classification, which underscores the clinical seriousness of the problem.

K. Young distinguished several main types of internet addiction (Table 1). This classification retains its significance to this day and serves as a basis for subsequent research.

Table 1

Main types of internet addiction (based on K. Young's classification)

Type	Description
Cyber-relationship	Excessive involvement in social networks and online communication, withdrawal from real relationships
Gaming addiction	Psychological dependence on online and computer games — the most widespread type
Information overload	Continuous searching for and consumption of content, videos and data
Net compulsions	Becoming absorbed in activities such as online shopping, gambling and trading
Cyber-sexual	Dependence associated with the uncontrolled consumption of relevant content

Source: compiled by the author based on Young K. (1999).

The prevalence of different forms of digital addiction is not equal. The data presented in Diagram 1 show that dependence on smartphones and social networks is the most common among adolescents.

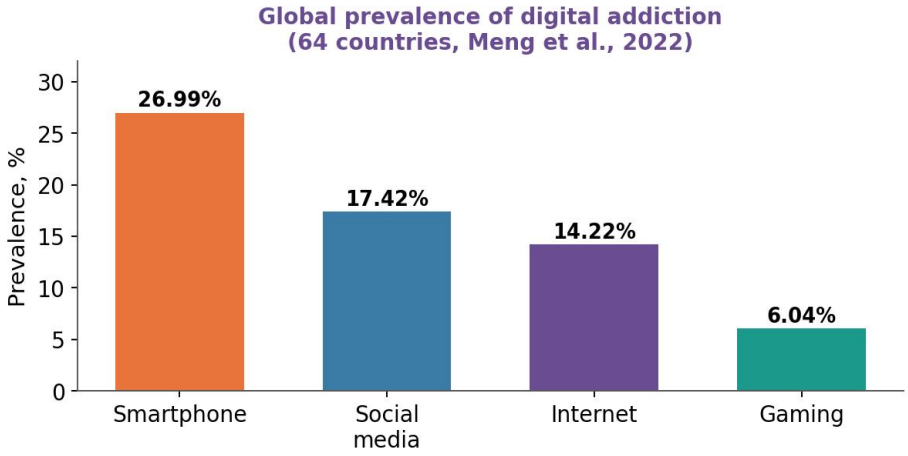
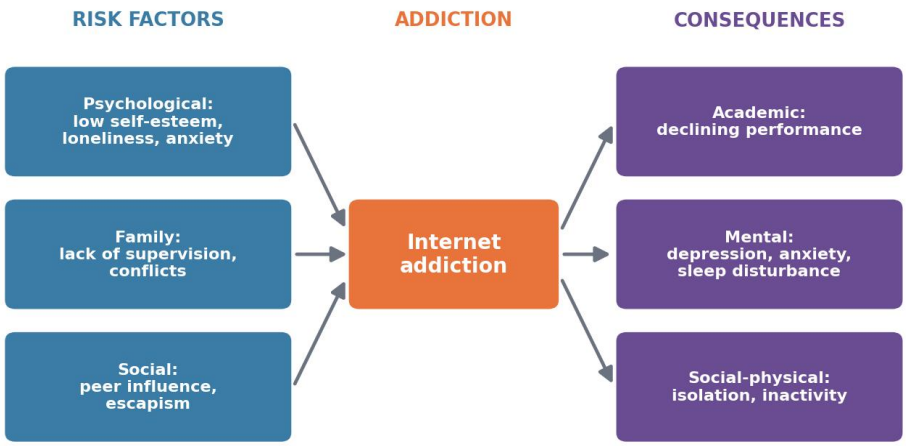


Diagram 1. Global prevalence of digital addiction, % (Meng et al., 2022).

Psychological factors of internet addiction in adolescents

Adolescence is a crisis stage marked by physical, emotional and social changes, and it is precisely at this age that the personality is most prone to internet addiction. According to E. Erikson's theory, during this period the adolescent resolves the task of self-identity and finding a social role; if this process becomes complicated, the virtual space may turn into a means of escaping real-life problems (escapism).

Research divides the psychological factors leading to internet addiction into several groups. Personal (intrapsychic) factors include low self-esteem, feelings of loneliness, anxiety and depression, and a lack of self-regulation skills. Family factors include insufficient parental attention or, conversely, excessive control, family conflicts, and the absence of warm relationships. Social factors include peer pressure, weak real communication skills, and the inability to organise leisure time meaningfully. The interaction of these factors and their consequences are presented in Scheme 1.

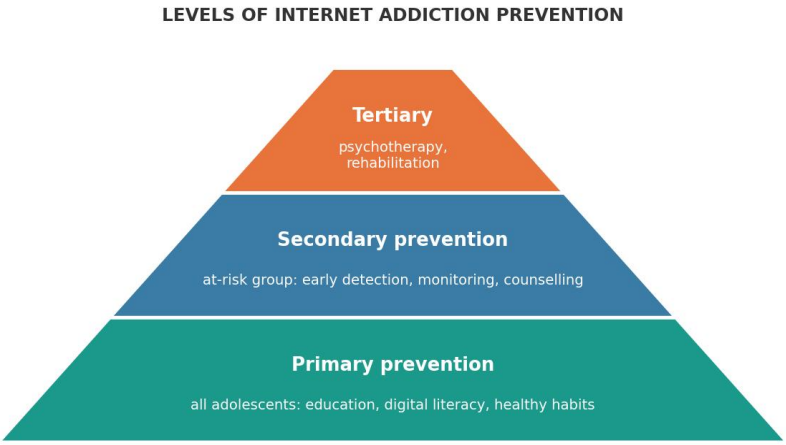


Scheme 1. Psychological factors, mechanism and consequences of internet addiction.

At the psychophysiological level, addiction is associated with the brain's reward system (dopamine release): virtual activity provides rapid pleasure, and this sensation is sought repeatedly. As a result, the adolescent's satisfaction from real-life achievements decreases, academic performance declines, sleep and physical activity are disrupted, and social isolation increases. For this reason, internet addiction should be regarded not only as an individual but also as a socio-pedagogical problem.

Psychological characteristics of protection and prevention

Protecting adolescents from internet addiction does not mean banning the internet altogether, but rather forming a culture of its reasonable, balanced and safe use. In modern psychology, prevention is carried out at three levels (Scheme 2): primary (educational work aimed at all adolescents), secondary (early identification and monitoring of the at-risk group), and tertiary (psychotherapeutic treatment of an already formed dependence).



Scheme 2. The three levels of internet addiction prevention.

The most effective direction of prevention is strengthening the adolescent's internal psychological resources: developing skills of self-regulation, time planning, emotional management and healthy self-esteem. In this, the family, the school and the individual themselves play an important role. The main measures are systematised in Table 2.

Table 2

Measures for protecting adolescents from internet addiction

Level	Psychological measures
Family	Establishing warm and trusting relationships; setting reasonable limits on screen time; parents serving as a positive example; spending leisure time together
School	Lessons on digital literacy and safety; monitoring by a psychologist; alternative activity through clubs and sport;

Level	Psychological measures
	encouraging live communication with peers
Individual	Skills of self-regulation and time planning; forming hobbies and goals; physical activity; healthy management of emotions

Source: compiled by the author based on the analysis.

In practice, among psycho-correction methods, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), trainings and group sessions, as well as family counselling, yield effective results. Most importantly, the measures should be implemented as a single system, in cooperation between the family, the educational institution and a specialist psychologist.

Conclusion

The conducted analysis has shown that internet addiction is a complex phenomenon closely linked to the psychological characteristics of adolescence, and its prevention requires a comprehensive and consistent approach. Low self-esteem, loneliness, a lack of family supervision and weak self-regulation skills are the main psychological factors of addiction.

The most effective way of protecting adolescents from internet addiction is not prohibition, but the strengthening of internal psychological resources, the formation of a healthy digital culture, and the provision of harmonious cooperation between the family, the school and specialists. Starting such preventive work from an early age serves to raise a mentally healthy and well-rounded generation in the future.

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