

# PARENTS' OPINION ABOUT CYBER ADDICTION OF THEIR CHILDREN IN PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE

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## Abstract

The problem, named cyber addiction, is rather actual nowadays. It is very discussed, especially in the century of globalization and technologies. Addictive usage of digital devices may be a characteristic not only for adults but for children as well. Many authors make researches in this area. They investigate different aspects of cyber addiction: reason, symptoms, outcome, determinants for its developing, consequences, mental and physical disorders that it may cause. There are conceptual models which include family as a main reason for children's cyber addiction and a basic structure to build a treatment program on. At the same time, family is a good preventer as well. More and more parents have begun to use Internet as a cost-free babysitter. Small babies do not allow to be feed up if there is no screen in front of their faces. Mum's smartphone is panacea for every child's problem: crying, injury, fear, cradling. Many of the modern parents are addictive too. They are always with a digital device in their hand and this the behavioural model that they promote to their children. To be silent is a really good reason for a mother or a father to supply her/his baby with a smartphone, or a tablet.

All this provoked a research which main goal is to analyse parent's opinion about their children's cyber addiction. 160 mothers and fathers of children in primary school age are examined through a questionnaire that includes: some personal data (gender, age, profession, age and number of children in family); parents' attitudes to digital devices; their opinion about child's behaviour on and offline; do they use smartphone for prize and punishment; should new technologies be used in educational programs and so on. Results are very indicative about existence of cyber addicted children, despite their comparatively smaller number. Some of the parents seems to deny the problem, but they contradict themselves which shows that they are not aware of the seriousness of the problem. There is another fact that should light scholars' red light: some of the children cheat their parents and do not obey their requirements. This is an undoubtedly evidence that pathological usage of Internet and digital devices exists. Some parents are absolutely positive that information technologies are very useful if used for educational purposes and under adults' control.

Keywords: Cyber addiction, Internet parenting, E-safety, Child's development, New technologies, Internet literacy, Information and communication competence.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The theme for parents' opinion about cyber addiction of their children in primary school age is very actual because we are living in a time when cyber addiction is phenomenon difficult to handle with. Internet and social media predetermine youths' behaviour and they are not able to live without digital devices. This a huge responsibility of the educational subjects (parents, teachers, society) to neutralize negative consequences of everyday using smart phones, tablets, computers, play station, e-games. Another problem is very discussed as well. This is the problem for children's e-safety which could hardly be ensured and guaranteed by anyone. Some parents are afraid of the new technologies, because they don't understand them. This means that the degree of digital literacy is very important for parents' attitudes towards virtual space. Other parents are very positive that love to information technologies is a main characteristic of a techno-generation. They think that it is absolutely pointless to try to keep children away from Internet and social networks. All this has provoked a research that aims to investigate parents' point of view in this area.

## 2 RELATED WORK

In the beginning of 21st century, parents' opinion about computers and Internet were quite different from now. Some researches show that it depends on family's social-economic situation to have computer at home and access to Internet. Parents are rather sure that having it at home leads to

better conditions of life and they are absolutely agreeing that their children should know about computers. Something more, lack of computer at home is a reason for a child to become outsider. Parents begin to understand that and react immediately, because their son or daughter feels sad [1]. In these years new media starts to change lives. Children spend more and more time in front of the screen, playing games, full of aggression and violence [2] [3]. Some scientists predict that Internet usage will be out of control and will turn into addiction with the following characteristics: everyday usage; no awareness of time, spent online; decreasing interest in other activities like sport, studying, hobbies; losing social relationships – avoiding friends and family members; get angry when offline; searching for Internet chats instead of face to face communication [4] [3]. So, it is normal for parents to concern more and more for their children's behaviour online; for their safety; for the length of time, spent in Internet; for their virtual "friends" and so on. That's why some of them prefer to buy interactive toys instead of computer or tablet. Interactive toys are interesting, beautiful and educational [5]. But it is good only for small kids. When they grow up, their interest could hardly be slept with interactive dolls.

Some authors underline that parents' role is not only to provide child with computer and Internet, but they also have to control its usage [3]. Many scholars have researched the responsibility of parents regarding their children's activities online, as well as parents' influence on kids' point of view about Internet usage. These scholars have investigated not only negative, but positive characteristics of new technologies, especially for development of youth (psychological, behavioural, educational). They are categorical that parents' control ensures child's safety in virtual reality. Related to this, results taken by a research show that there is a connection between parents' Internet literacy and their rules about frequency of computer usage: Parents with high Internet literacy seem to thrust their children and allow them to be online more frequently than parents with low Internet literacy. When a mother or a father is an Internet user, she or he knows what child is doing there and is not afraid of its safety. And finally, there is a relation between parenting style and Internet parenting when we talk about management of children' Internet usage frequency [6]. Other authors believe that parents use information technologies as much as their children. Difference is in the activities: a parent that works on computer, or pays bills, or connects relatives abroad, believes that his activities are useful and his time online is meaningful. And the same parent is absolutely sure that his son or daughter is wasting his/her time playing games, listening to music, watching videos [7]. Undoubtedly, parents' opinion about Internet is that this is the most developing technology. They even define it "as a window open to the world". Internet is the best way to communicate and to get information. Parents are not blind, and they see that information technologies influences their children not only positively, but negatively as well. For very this reason, parents have got the biggest responsibility to protect their children from potential risks and dangers online [8]. While parenting Internet, however, parents use it in a way that is a not very good example for children: they have mobile phone's talks while driving; they watch the screen while having dinner; they don't pay attention when their children speak to them, because they are online; and they even spend a lot of time playing computer games; they are sharing children's and family's photos in social nets without worrying about risks and dangers [9]. Many authors investigate parents' behaviour online [10]. Some researches show that children's opinion is that rules should be for everyone in family with no matter of his age: the same rules for adults and youths. It is not an appropriate educational method to give bad example and the then to request exactly the opposite behaviour [9]. Parents often have difficulties to follow their own rules regarding computer usage [11].

When relationships between parents and children are good, this is important for child's health and development. The recent researches indicate that the time spent online is the time not spent with parents. So, it could be said that information technologies affect child-parent relationship in a negative way. Something more, digital devices help friends gathering but destroy family atmosphere [12]. This is another reason that makes parents angry, because they want to spend some time talking or playing with their children, but they are not offline, so they see and hear nothing. There is no doubt that Internet parenting is an educational problem that grows bigger with every single day. This is the reason that makes some parents to search for professional help. They are not confident in their managing abilities, but they are ready to meet a professional and to talk with him, so to solve the problem [13]. Using information technologies in education is a good way to respect children: thus they will understand that computers are not only for games, but their potential should be used reasonable. The question of information and communication competence is rather discussed [14]. It refers not only to parents, but to children as well.

This short literature preview has given the opportunity to make some conclusions about researches, made in the area of parenting Internet, and received results. It has become clear that mother's and father's concerns are about: time spent online; child's activities online; dangers in virtual reality; effect on other child's activities; computer and grammar literacy.

This means that if parent gives a good example for technologies usage and children is educated how to use computer, mobile phone, tablet and so on, appropriately, digital devices will help his optimal develop. Spending regular time online, not only for games and fun, knowing all risks and without reducing sport, studying and other real activities, saving friends and face to face communication with peers, developing computer literacy, all this are indicators that new technologies usage is appropriate and reasonable.

### **3 METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH**

To investigate the parents' opinion about behavior of young children in Internet and about how do they use information and communication technologies, a survey with 160 parents of 4-th grade students was conducted. 85 % of the respondents are women and 15 % of them are men. 80 % of respondents live in big towns, and 20 % - in small settlements. Their age is as follows:

- 41% are between 3 and 39 years old;
- 52% are between 40 and 49 years old;
- 7% are under 30 years old or over 50.

It is important to investigate the number of children in the family and their age – it is assumed that when there is an older brother or sister, the younger kid enters in Internet world earlier:

- 44 of parents have a child older than 4th grade;
- 55 parents have a child younger than 4th grade;
- 2 parents have three kids;
- 1 parent has twins;
- 9 parents haven't answered the question.

For this research a questionnaire was used, including four sections: A – demographic module (question concerning gender, age, the hometown's size, profession, number of children in family); B – technologies access module (number and kind of personal devices possessed, access to other devices, frequency of use of devices, purpose of use of devices, Internet access); C – behavioral module (activities that could replace devices usage, students' reactions to parents' restrictions concerning the use of digital devices, actions against parental control); D – emotional module (feelings when devices are not available, feelings when using a device, preferences and interests); E – educational aspect (are information and communication technologies appropriate for students' development). The survey is conducted in parallel with research about children's opinion regarding similar questions. Thus, there is a real opportunity to compare results, received by parents' and by children's questionnaire.

### **4 RESULTS**

As per results received, children have full access to digital devices (Figure 1). They are in possession of a personal digital device as follows: smart-phone - 34,8%; tablet - 25,5%; laptop - 20,8%; computer - 14,7%, Play station - 3,4%, phone - 0,5%, e-game - 0,2%. Some of them are in possession of more than one digital device. Nowadays it hardly could speak about a family and a home without information and communication technologies (ICT), which is quite indicative that their usage is daily. Limitations are difficult to be settled.

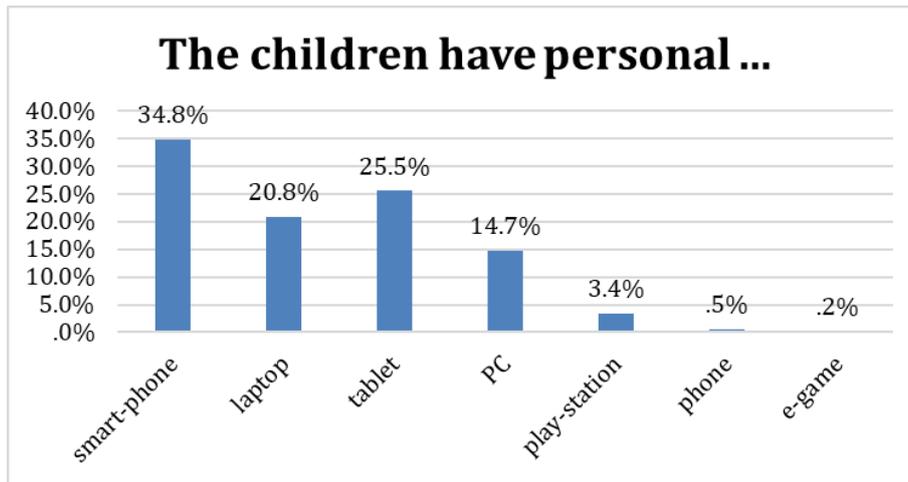


Figure 1. Access to digital devices

There are some differences between children living in big towns and those that live in small towns (Figure 2). Almost 100% of students living in big town have personal smart-phone against around 70% in smaller settlements, but children there use more computers than laptops and tablets and they are not in possession of e-games.

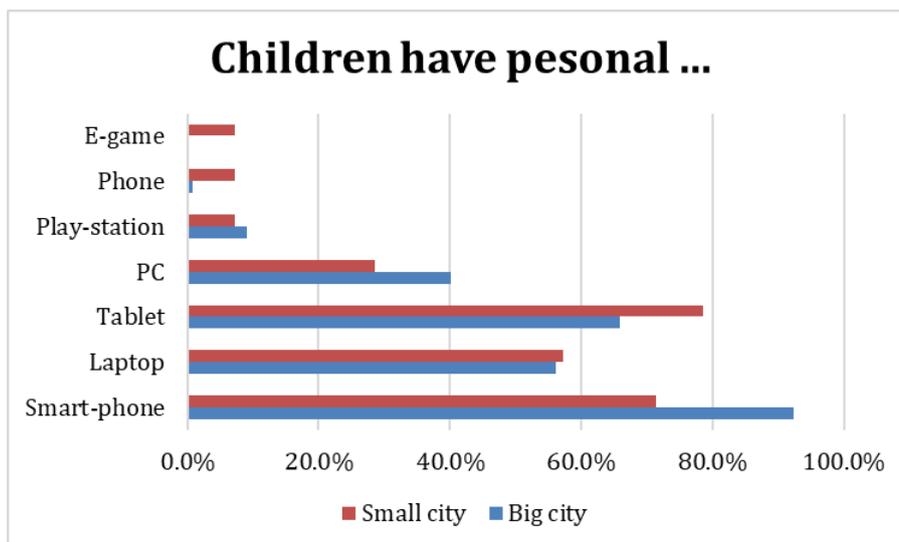


Figure 2. Differences in digital devices' possession between children living in big and small towns

Respondents are rather categorical about children's access to Internet. 66,50% of parents declare that their children have unlimited Internet access. 29,8% mark the opposite: in this number are 0,6% of parents which restrict Internet usage to 1 hour per day; and 1,9% of parents which control Internet access of the children. It has become clear that we could hardly speak about a home without digital device and Internet nowadays. This increases parents' responsibility and task to control its usage. Without parenting Internet some kids may be in front of the screen day and night literally. They are not always aware of risk and consequences of their activities as well, and they don't know how to protect themselves and where to search for help if anything happens.

Parents opinion about children's overusing Internet is a little bit reconciled (Figure 3): 32,40% share their point of view that this is absolutely normal for a today's kid to spent more and more time in virtual space. May be one of the most important factors about this fact is that almost every child has got personal device and Internet access. 31,29% answer that overusing Internet is not a myth, but a closest reality. 24,30% of parents think that ICT are used only with educational purpose and 12,10% are not able to give concrete answer. Differences in respondents' opinion is coming to show that they have various points of view. Respectively this will affect the style of their Internet parenting. It is

impossible to predict how every parent will react to his child's Internet overusing, but it's understood that parent's opinion will be a base for his control.

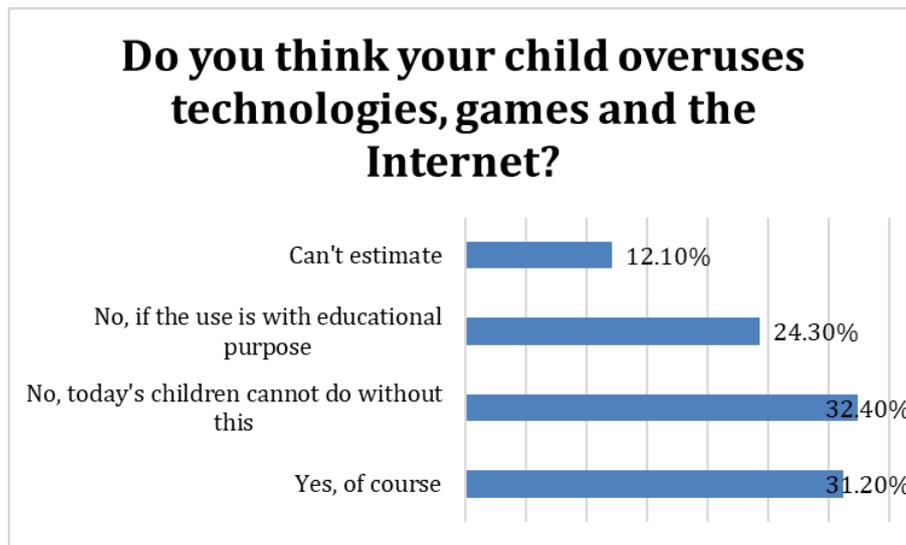


Figure 3. Overusing Internet

According to respondents' answers children spend different length of time in virtual space (Figure 4). In descending order their opinions are as follows:

- 25,7% - when obtains parents' permission;
- 23,00% - some hours every day;
- 15,7% - when prepares homework;
- 8,00% - all the time when at home;
- 7,7% - it is forbidden at school;
- 5,7% - every child is different;
- 5,00% - only in free time at school;
- 4% - uncontrolled;
- 3,1% - every single free minute;
- 2,7% - seldom;
- 1,5% - all the time;
- 1,1% - during the free time.

Parents do not point if this is time spent in Internet despite their control or this is only uncontrolled activities. In addition, there are 4% that can't estimate how long their children are online. Here comes the question if they observe their child's behaviour and if they are parenting Internet at all. Very alarming are the following results: 8,00% - all the time at home; 4% - uncontrolled; 3,1% - every single minute and 1,5% - all the time. Maybe this is an indication that there are symptoms of cyber addiction and professional intervention is necessary. In similar researches this question is very interesting, because children always answer not like their parents and teachers. This fact helps parents and educators to understand that children have not real glue of their stay online. 23,00% of the respondents marked that some hours every day their children are using digital devices. This percent is not low, but we accept that these hours includes not only gaming, music listening and having fun, but studying as well.

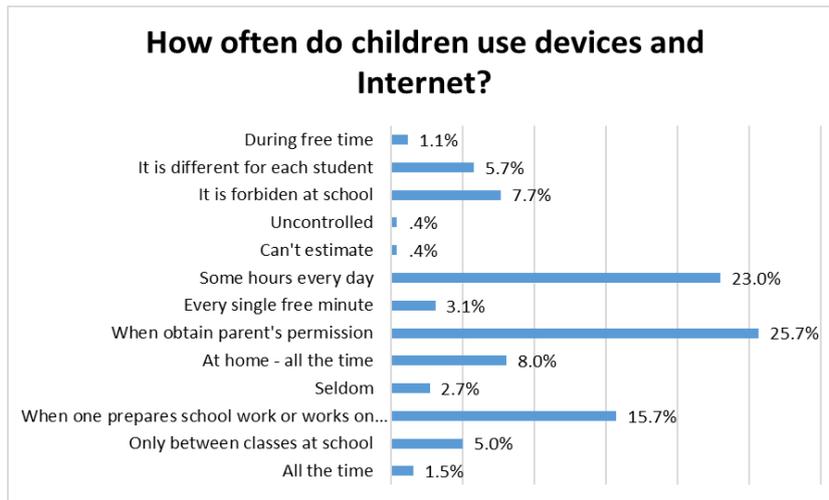


Figure 4. Frequency of digital devices usage

Respondents point that the main reason for using digital devices is playing games - 29,6% of parents pointed so (Figure 5). This is the most favourite and attractive for children activity online, leded by having fun - 17,00%, chats - 13,9%, social networking - 4,7% and Internet surfing - 2,7%. It is good news that parents see their children to use computer for searching for information - 18,8% and school preparation - 13,2%. Parents are calmer when digital devices are used for educational reasons and not just for playing stupid games, full of aggression, blood and people killing. This is a good start to settle a balance which means ICT to be used for fun, but for education as well.

Respondents claim that there are various feelings when kids are offline (Figure 6). Most of them are board, but a number of children do not care, because they always can replace computer with other pleasant and useful activities. Some children get annoyed, angry, nervous, even sad. A very small percent, but quite indicative, show that for some children it is impossible to stay away from smart telephone, computer, tablet. This could be determined as another symptom of cyber addiction that parents have to consider immediately. Different moods of children, most of which are in dark color are very important to show that taking the device away from a kid is not a problem solution. And finally, sometimes parents become nervous, because their children become nervous and noisy and annoying, so they prefer to give them back the access.

It turns out that Internet activities could be replaced with outdoor (31,6%) or indoor games (24,3%) as well as reading books (14,8%). However, some respondents pointed that screen is replaced by screen - 29,1% of the children are watching TV when are offline. Unfortunately, 3,8% declare that nothing could replace computer games. Even a small percent, it is a sign that virtual world is swallowing kid's real world, kid's relationships with family and friends, kid's studying, hobbies and so on. This will last until there remains nothing attractive about child in real life and it prefers to stay online longer and longer.

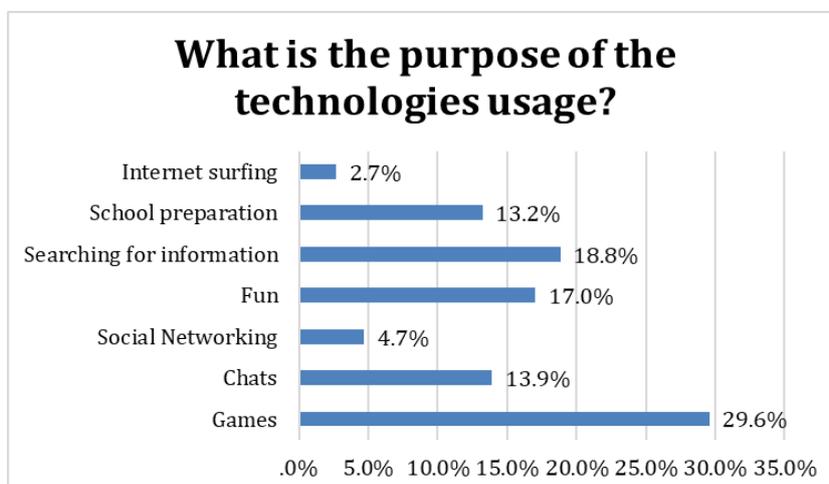


Figure 5. Purpose of digital devices usage

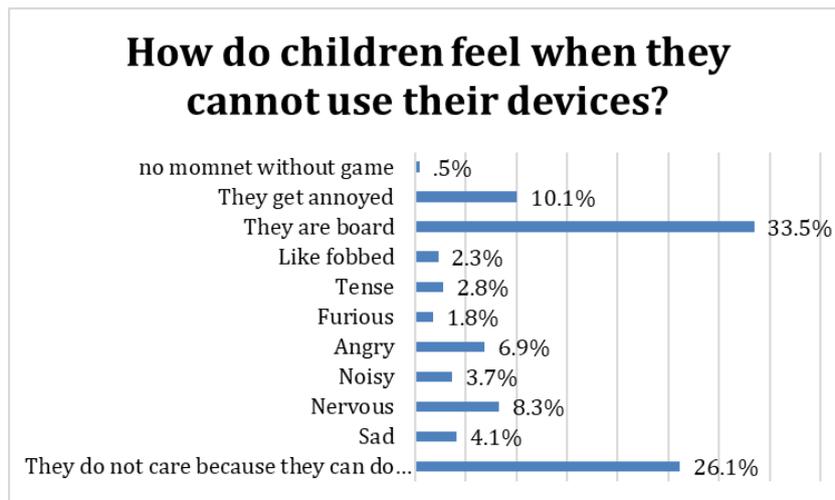


Figure 6. Feelings when access to ICT is forbidden or limited

It seems that most of the children listen to their parents (Figure 7) and wait patiently when adults restrict access to digital devices and to Internet (18,3%). They do their job carefully (12,1%). However, this is not applicable to everyone. Some respondents share that in similar situation their children get very angry, start with negotiations, crying, seek support from someone else (grandmother or grandfather for example). 3% even do not comply which is not a good mentioning of parental control. The fact that a problem occurs when access is not guaranteed is worrying, because every action has its ends, but Internet activities may last forever with no rest.

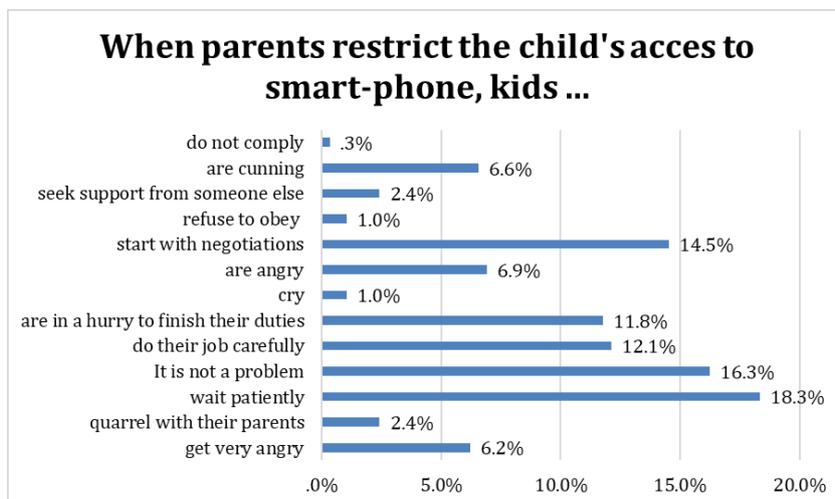


Figure 7. Children's behavior when their access to ICT and Internet is restricted or limited

100% of respondents declare that children forget about their smart phones and other digital devices when they are outside. This are great news, but not always there is a real opportunity for a walk. Weather could be cold or rainy, parents may be tired or busy. So, this shouldn't be the only one alternative.

Parents often prefer other activities (24,3%) instead children's staying in front of the screen all the time (Figure 8). They confess that are making a note (35,3%); they worry about children's health; they are begging the kids to stop (12,3%); get angry (12,9%). Only 6,00% do not mind, and 3% feel satisfied, because children are developing their digital literacy. Another 3% of respondents point that also spend a lot of time in front of the computer which come to confirm the strength of personal example.

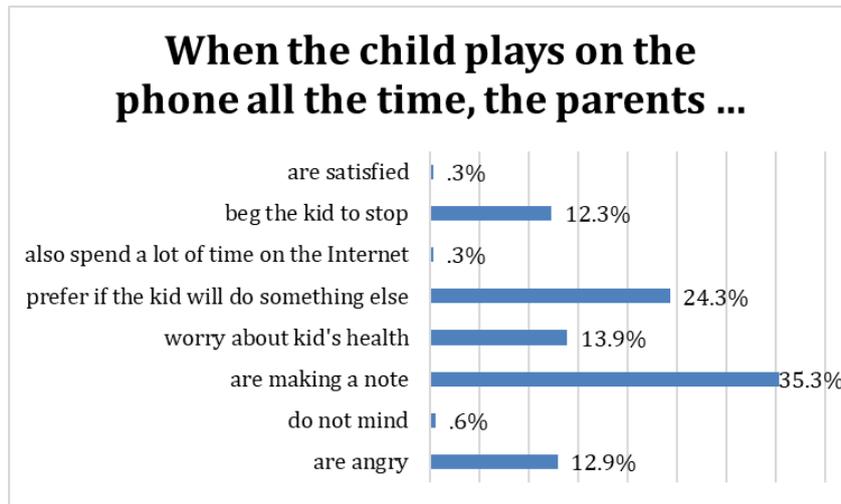


Figure 8. Parents' feelings when their children are online

Next question is very interesting and could be a base for big discussion (Figure 9). Contemporary pedagogical theory and practice deny punishment as educational method. Taking away kid's mobile telephone by a parent is more demonstration of powerlessness than indicator for power and parenting control. Almost the half of respondents - 41,6% - say that very often take the phone forcibly using it as a punishment. The question is: is this method adequate if used so often without positive results (8,1% of the respondents confess that this method does not work at all, that has no effect). Something more, separation with phone could increase abstinence.

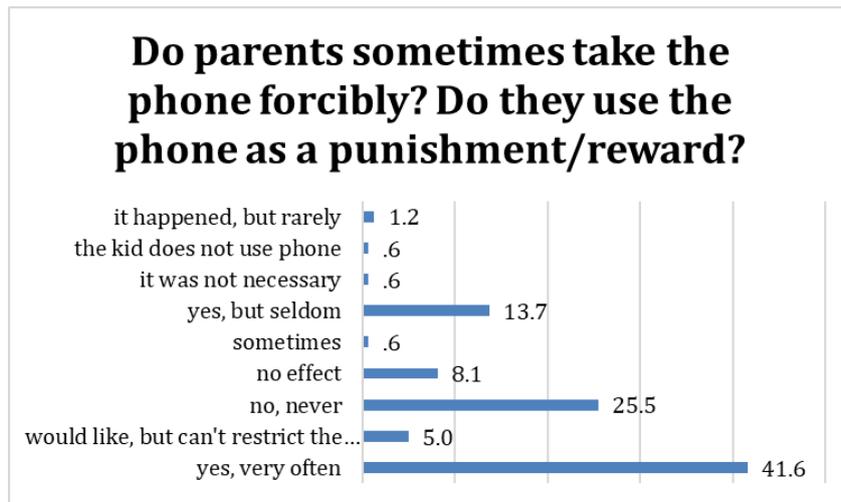


Figure 9. Smart phone as punishment or reward

Only 25,5% of parents never use digital devices as punishment. Some of them take the device away from child very rarely. Others think it is pointless. And again, only 5,00%, but very categorically point that they are not able to limit kid's access to computer and Internet. Then, could we talk about parental control? Children feel sad when they are offline, but when they are online, moods are quite different (Figure 10). They like a lot when they are in virtual reality (37,4%) and they feel satisfied (22,9%), happy (17,8%), smart (3,3%) and so on. It is clear that being online brings positive emotions and the opposite - staying offline brings bad emotions. Some parents declare their opinion that when playing children are nervous (6,5%) and worried (7,9%). It is psychological characteristic how e-life attack child's mood and his emotional comfort. We should not forget that children have not enough social experience and they are not able to express their feeling. Internet is not good educator in this order of thoughts.

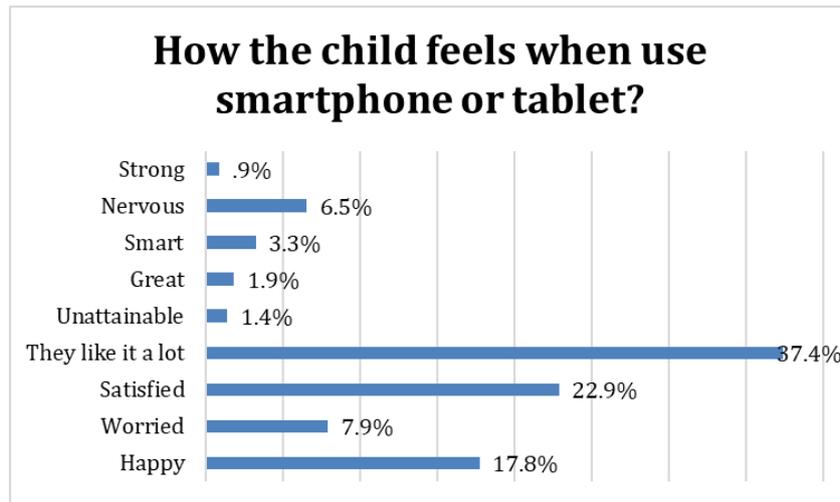


Figure 10. Children's feelings when they are online

Parents' opinion is that children prefer to play with real friends - 60,9%; than to play with virtual friends - 18,00%. Some kids want to do both. Something more, 81,4% like playing outside with real friends more that playing inside with virtual friends. This result is very optimistic, because it shows that priorities of new generation are not out of order yet. It can be used in family planning which to include more sport and other outside activities than staying inside only with smart phone or computer. It is not clear what are outside activities, because we can see smart phones and bent heads on the playground as well.

When answering the question "For the child more interesting is to ..." parents specify that children prefer playing offline with real friends (81,4%). Only 12,4% think that their children prefer to communicate with Internet friends. 2,5% state the answer "Both". Some of the parents think that a virtual friend is a real friend no matter that the kid doesn't know it. Here parental control is compulsory because problems with students' safety could occur. Talking about risks and dangers in Internet is a good educational way to child's understanding.

One of the most researchable cyber addiction symptoms is mood improvement when get access to ICT. Parents had to answer the following question: "When the child is sad and starts playing on the phone, she/he quickly recovers her/his mood. True or false?". According 18% of the parents the children very often change to better their mood when start playing digitally. For 64,6% - it happens sometime; and 16,1% state that never happened. To be sad and to use Internet as a pill for a better mood is not a good recipe. It may lead to other addiction in future.

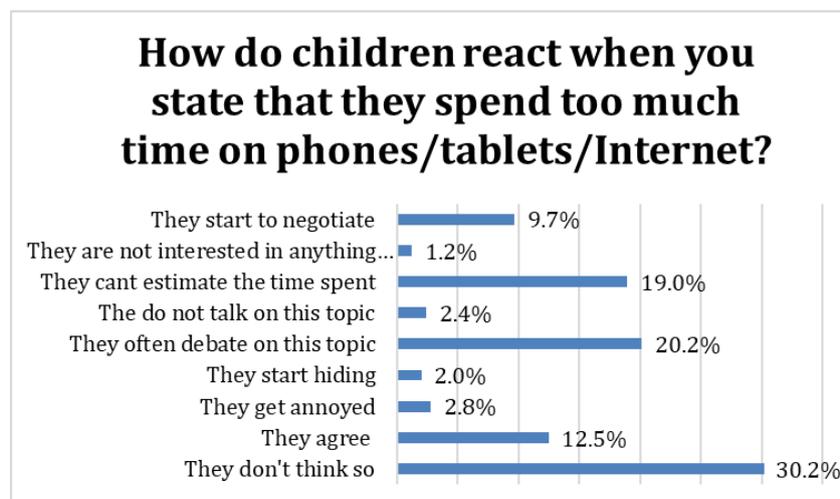


Figure 11. Children's reaction when they are told that spend to much time online

30,2% of respondents point that children are not agree with their mothers' and fathers' note that spend too much time online (Figure 11). In most cases they start a debate on this topic (20,2%), start to negotiate (9,7%), get annoyed (2,8%) or start hiding. Only 12,5% agree with their parents. Actually, it seems that children have not a real idea of the time spent with bowed head. 19,0% of respondents underline this, because it is very important for next activities and interventions with students.

What children do when are not with a smart phone in their hands (Figure 12). Most of them meet friends (24%); do other hobbies (21,00%); do sports (14,9%), spent time with family (18,7%) and prepare themselves for school (12,6%). Nowadays there are different possibilities for out-of-school engagements. Most of them can be used in social-pedagogical work with cyber addicted youths.

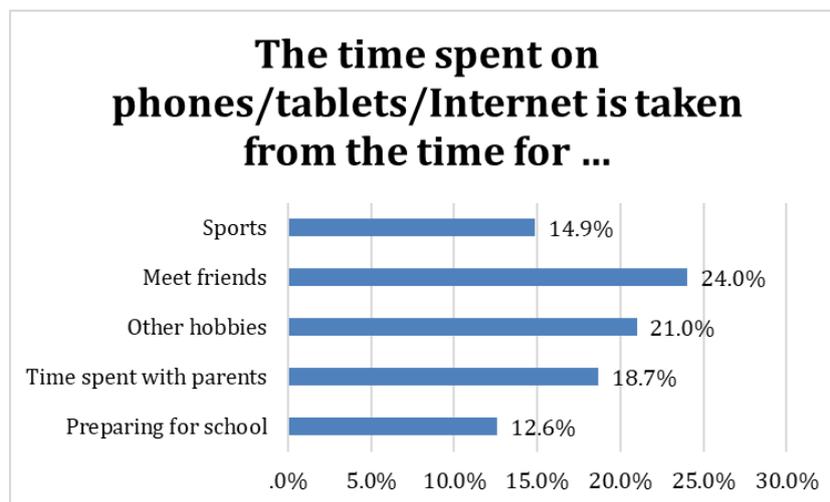


Figure 12. ICT replacing with other activities

According the role of information technologies for the development and the life of their children, 60,9% of respondents believe in positive role of the ICT usage. Other 14,3% parents point that ICT disrupt educational process. Parents' point of view on this topic is very important, because no one else could see so close what effects cause digital devices to his/her behaviour and social dialogues with others.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

This research is an excellent reason to make some important conclusions. They are always related to basic parents' activities, including parenting Internet, checking kid's activities online, controlling time pent in front of the screen, giving information about risky behaviour in social networks. Instead of a final, some conclusions can be done:

- 1 It is not appropriate to forbidden on children anything and limited his/her access to Internet if parent is online and gives a bad example to his own kid. It seems that rules are not for everyone, which makes children not to trust their mothers and fathers.
- 2 Children want to play, they like to be outside. A plan with different activities could be made (football, painting, dancing, singing). When they are outside play fewer e-games, so it must be a good sign for pedagogical work with children. Including different activities is not to keep the child away from new technologies but to show him/her that they are not the one possibility to have fun.
- 3 Nowadays there is almost not a home without at least a computer and Internet. Child could hardly be named an outsider through this mark. A baby is born in such an atmosphere and it is not realistic to keep it away from information and communication technologies. It is similar to our grandparents living without electricity and hot water. Should our generation be judged that use these resources today?
- 4 It is not educational to use smart phone as punishment or reward. Children understand that parents use their unpressured which gets its pressure higher.
- 5 It is very important for a parent to pay attention to his/her child's behavior online. There are special services which provide help and useful information regarding risks in Internet. School

helps as well with preventive and other educational interventions. Parenting control is the best way to child's e-safety.

- 6 It can't be denied that ICT are useful for children's development but their usage should be controlled and limited. A good opportunity for control is mother's or father's opinion about ICT. Digital literacy is a phenomenon that requires real studying, not only playing games. So child's studying should be required by his parents.
- 7 Emotional intelligence in children is still developing. Students are still vulnerable against different influences, that's why a parent or a teacher should lead them towards emotional adulthood. If there are disorders in this area, addiction could occur in a higher age.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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