

Title: Perception of problematic consequences of the use of different ICTs by adolescents and their relationship with subjective well-being

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Theme: Children and adolescents and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

Thematic importance: In line with the conference theme “Children’s Rights and Opportunities in an Unequal World: Research, Policy and Intervention”, this paper focuses on Children and adolescents and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Sub-themes: Computers, internet, media and the well-being of children and adolescents.

Introduction and objectives: The continuous use of technology may lead to “problematic use”, something recognized as a public health concern (WHO) and it can be associated with serious psychological and interpersonal relationship problems as addiction, loneliness or cyberbullying. The “problematic use” of ICTs referred to the number of hours of use and how it affects adolescents leading a normal daily life, but not only in terms of the time invested in this use but also in the impact that it causes in personal and social areas of adolescent life. There is no agreement in the scientific literature about the impact that technology use has on adolescents’ subjective well-being (SWB). On the one hand, some studies point out that it may contribute to greater subjective well-being, but others suggest, that this may, in fact, lessen it.

Methods: The present study is part of the 3rd wave of international Children’s Worlds project in which data have been collected in 35 countries to explore the subjective well-being children and adolescents aged 8, 10 and 12-year-old. We analysed a sample of 2.088 adolescents aged 12-year-old (51.2% boys) from Catalonia (Spain). We explored a list of items referred to different problematic consequences of the use of ICTs by adolescents (Viñas et al., 2018) and a question about which people they talk to when they have these problems (Vivas, 2018). To analyse the SWB we used three measures: a cognitive scale (CW-SWBS), an affective scale (CW-PNAS) and a single item of Overall Life Satisfaction (OLS).

Results: Adolescents report that the most frequent negative consequence of problematic ICT use is related to excessive use [*To have spent more hours than usual*] (39.1%), followed by to have said inappropriate things (23.4%), having problems with friends (16.3%) and parents (14%), and to decrease their dedication to other leisure activities (14.6%). When they have had some of these problems, 32.9% say not telling anyone. Half of the sample inform that they talk about it with their parents (56.7%) and with friends (53.8%). A 77.6% say they do not talk to their teachers or any other trusted adult (69.6%). Adolescents who use ICTs excessively have significantly lower scores on items of the cognitive and affective SWB and with the OLS. In the same direction, adolescents who do not talk to anyone about ICT-related problems feel less happy and sadder and present lower scores on the cognitive SWB and with the OLS.

Conclusions and implications: The data show the relevance of interventions to improve the impact of excessive ICT use on adolescents’ SWB, promoting their digital competences. Improving communication between adolescents and adults about ICT use is key to enabling them to trust on their adults as a source of support in risky situations.