Institut für Didaktik der Demokratie

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STEPin – Supporting parents to deal with the excessive online time and habits of their children: a prevention and intervention programme for all

National Monitoring Report

IO1–A2-1

Developed by:

ASSERTED KNOWLEDGE
THE ICT EQUALISERS

STEPin

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1. General Introduction

Digital technologies and the internet have a huge impact in our ever-changing society. Using the internet has become the new lifestyle for youngsters across Europe in recent years, and the age at which youngsters begin using the internet is lowering year by year, while the amount of time they spend online is rapidly increasing. Despite the many advantages the internet may provide in terms of education and learning possibilities for children, it may also pose significant threats and obstacles, such as the internet's addictive nature. In addition to the aforementioned issues, parents as adults confront comparable issues, with 42 percent of people in the EU lacking adequate digital skills.

This paper is part of the STEPIN European project, and it intends to give an overview of the existing situation in Greece in terms of dealing with Internet Addictive Behaviour (IAB), as well as any requirements and gaps in this area.

2. State of the Art in the field of IAB – Case of Greece

Related Scientific Research in the field of IAB in Greece

Internet addiction (IA) refers to the compulsive, excessive use of the internet and the irritation or dysthymic behaviour that occurs during its deprivation (Mitchell P., 2000) According to a survey undertaken by nine European institutions in partnership with the Hellenic Association for the Study of Internet Addiction Disorders, Greece ranks second in Europe for rates of internet addiction among its population, after the United Kingdom (EEMDED[1]). Dr. Konstantinos Siomos, psychiatrist and president of the EEMDED, recently presented the study's findings at a conference on education innovation in Larissa.

The study confirms the findings of prior studies, such as a 2014 study that found that 10% of fourth-year medical students at Thessaloniki University, as well as 7% of high-ranking military forces members, were addicted to computer games to the point where their academic performance worsened. According to the study, the average addicted user was a child or teenager who spent several hours each day on the internet and playing electronic games. Depression, a lack of other interests, melancholy moods, ADHD, and an inability to adapt to school were among the symptoms. In the study it is highlighted that interacting with an electronic game or social media networks stimulates an instant reward feedback loop. A single

[1] Hellenic Society for the Study of Internet Addiction Disorder

like on Facebook, a nice or terrible comment on social media, or a video game victory can raise or drop dopamine levels.

On the research, Dr. Siomos also mention that parents have to seek professional help if they feel their child is hooked to the internet or electronic games, recommending that they visit a child psychologist to assess whether the behavior is due to addiction or is exacerbated by other mental health conditions including ADHD, mood swings, or anxiety problems.

According to another study "Internet addiction and loneliness", conducted by Zygouris, Nikos et al. (2015), which examines the relationship between internet addiction and loneliness in adolescents Greek students from 13-15 years shown that there is a high positive correlation between loneliness and Internet addiction. Children found addicted to the internet showed highly statistically significant differences compared with children in the control group. Survey results suggest that students addicted to the Internet have significantly higher rates of loneliness. The fact that the rates of internet addiction in the adolescents grow exponentially along with the highest rates of loneliness in the addicted students, makes the need for study of the phenomenon of Internet addiction imperative.

Finally, a study (Tsimtsiou, Zoi et al, 2016) among undergraduate medical students at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki School of Medicine, Greece, investigated the prevalence of Internet addiction (IA) to identify possible associations with sociodemographics and Internet habits. All students were invited to complete the online Internet Addiction Test (IAT) along with sociodemographics and preferences on Internet activities. The authors received 585 responses after three reminders (23.5 % response rate). Mild IA was found in 24.5 %, moderate in 5.4 %, and severe in 0.2 %. In multivariable analysis, the odds to develop IA were increased with visits in Internet cafes, the use of Facebook, Twitter, and online games. Using e-mails seemed to be protective against IA.

Policies/ Legislations dealing with IAB

Related guidelines and policies in dealing with Internet Addictive Behaviour in Greece can be found under the National Ministry of Health and Actions - Interventions and Primary Health Care Programs for Empowering Adolescent Health. The Hellenic Ministry of Health in the context of actions, interventions and programs of primary health care has posted on its official website educational material on Internet addiction, physical bullying and internet space for

raising awareness, informing the student population and strengthening the health of adolescents. Another policy are the recommendations set by the European Strategy 'Better Internet for Children' and also in collaboration with other countries in both European and international level. The implementation of the strategy involves the development of leaflets and informative materials for students and children, that provoke a more consistent and safer interaction with the online world.

The four pillars set out by the national strategy are:

- the development critical thinking skills and competences in dealing with the internet
- development of related learning material and resources
- ensure a safe online environment
- tackle incidents of harassment or manipulation online

Key Stakeholders dealing with IAB

Below you can find a list with some of the key stakeholders in Greece who are dealing with IAB:

SaferInternet4Kids.gr
ΓΙΑ ΕΝΑ ΑΣΦΑΛΕΣΤΕΡΟ ΔΙΑΔΙΚΤΥΟ

The Hellenic Center for Safe Internet started operating in July 2016 under the auspices of the Institute of Technology and Research and more specifically of the Institute of Informatics. He is the official representative in Greece of the Pan-European Organizations INSAFE / INHOPE that formulate the European strategy for a safe and quality internet as well as the recognized representative of Greece for the Expert Group on Safer Internet for Children of the European Commission.

KETHEA

Therapy Center for Dependent Individuals (KETHEA): KETHEA has created support programmes for adolescents and young adults who are addicted to Internet and video games. The programmes seek to restrict the time spent in front of the computer screen and playing video games and to enable young people to deal effectively with the challenges and problems of adolescence.

National & Kapodistrian University of Athens – Department of Psychology: The Department of Psychology of NKUA aims to promote research and innovation in various fields of studies, including topics such as internet addictive behaviour and problematic use of the internet.

Hellenic Society for the Study of Internet Addiction Disorder: A non-profit company founded in 2008 by a team of mental health experts, opening new avenues in the research of online behaviors and their impact on everyday life. It is the only scientific company in Europe that specializes in the field of internet addiction.

18ANO: 18ANO Internet Addiction Treatment Center services concern people addicted and not to substances that have had or have in their history any type of disruptive contact with the web, adults and are addressed to us with this request. The services that are provided are: Individual and group psychotherapy, Art and physical expression groups, Alternative psychoeducational groups

Best practices/ Training Programmes/ Initiatives

Here you can find a few good practices in the field of IAB in Greece:

Title	**NNS eTwinning**
Location	Online seminar
Organisation/Institution	National eTwinning Support Service
Contact Data	e-mail: support@seminars.etwinning.gr Contact number: 00302610-960361 Website : https://seminars.etwinning.gr/mod/page/view.php?id=32307

Target Group/Context	-Adults/ Parents -Professionals/ Educators
Content/Learning Outcomes	N/A
Description of the Process	ETwinning is a European action through which schools from different European countries, using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) tools, work together to reap pedagogical, social and cultural benefits. ETwinning offers the training seminar "Safe Internet EKDDA" for teachers of all specialties with a combination of asynchronous and modern distance education for the pedagogical use of ICT and Web 2.0 tools in the implementation of collaborative activities in projects and their integration into course teaching.
Resources needed	N/A
Evaluation of the Methodology	N/A

Title	**SaferInternet4Kids - Greek Safer Internet Center**
Location	Online
Organisation/Institution	Hellenic Center for Safe Internet
Contact Data	e-mail: contact@saferinternet4kids.gr Contact number: 0030210-6007686 Website: https://saferinternet4kids.gr/
Target Group/Context	Youth, Children, Parents, General Public
Content/Learning Outcomes	Provision of Online Learning Material and support to young internet users.
Description of the Process	The Hellenic Center for Safe Internet provides information, assistance and support to young and old internet users by developing three distinct actions through the website SaferInternet4Kids.gr, through the Helpline and through the Open Line of Complaints about illegal content of the SafeLine Internet.
Resources needed	N/A

Evaluation of the Methodology	N/A

Title	**Youth Power Programme**
Location	Online
Organisation/Institution	Greek Society Of Adolescent Medicine (G.S.A.M)
Contact Data	e-mail: info@youth-med.gr Contact Number: 0030-2107710824 Website: https://www.youth-med.gr/youthpower/index.php
Target Group/Context	- Young people - Adolescents
Content/Learning Outcomes	Digital presentations to raise awareness about safety on the internet and cyber-bullying.
Description of the Process	The Greek Society of Adolescent Medicine (G.S.A.M.) is a scientific, non-profit organization, active in the field of quality of life and health of adolescents and young people. The organization has been collaborating with academic institutions, NGOs and scientific societies globally. During the last years, it has been affiliated to the Adolescent Health Unit (A.H.U) of the Second Dpt of Pediatrics, University of Athens, "P. & A. Kyriakou" Childrens' Hospital supporting clinical, educational and research programs. In this context, an initiative is to provide information material for young people, regarding topics such as internet safety and cyber-bullying in the form of online digital presentations.
Resources needed	N/A
Evaluation of the Methodology	N/A

Title	**Cyber Alert** **#saferinternetday2021 Initiative**
Location	Greece – National Level - Online
Organisation/Institution	Cyber Crime Division of Greek Police Headquarters
Contact Data	e-mail: ccu@cybercrimeunit.gov.gr Contact number : 11188 Website : https://cyberalert.gr/
Target Group/Context	- Young People/Students/Children - Parents - General Public
Content/Learning Outcomes	Online material and event about safety on Internet.
Description of the Process	Online event and informing material of the Cybercrime Unit of Hellenic Police for the safe use of the internet from children, occasioned by the Safer Internet Global Day. At the heart of the action and the informative materials are the ways parents can children stay safe in the online world.
Resources needed	N/A
Evaluation of the Methodology	N/A

Needs and Gaps of Parents and Children and Adult Educators - Greece

This section of the report will give a summary of the findings from online questionnaires aimed at adult educators and parents/children in order to determine their needs and gaps in relation with Internet Addictive Behaviour.

The Needs of Adult Educators

A total of 10 adult educators took part in this research, with experience in the field of adult education from 4 months – 15 years. Almost all of the participants are working with parents as part of their target group in adult education, under courses with subjects as the following:

- Digital/Media Literacy
- Pedagogical/Study approaches
- Educational Psychology
- Stress management for Children

In terms of their knowledge regarding IAB, the majority of the participants (7 out of 10 respondents) had never some learning experience in the field of Internet Addictive Behaviour. The rest of the participants stated that they have attend only once a seminar or a conference on the topic of excessive internet use of children/adolescents and ways to moderate online time.

Based on that, is it reasonable that almost all of the participants (90%) stated that they do not have adequate knowledge on Internet Addictive Behaviour, and want to get more information and training especially in topics that are concerning parents, psychology and management of people with disabilities regarding internet use.

All of the participants showed an interest in learning more about Internet Addictive Behaviour and ways to mitigate it's impact on mental health, through seminars, specifically on topics such as:

- Symptoms of addiction
- Social Media exposure/addiction
- Ways for parents to deal with children's addiction
- Psychology of parents, psychology of people with special needs
- Addiction and its effects in physical/mental health
- Time-moderation techniques in front of the screen.
- Online gaming addiction

Furthermore, adult educators brought out the problems that they encounter while they are dealing with this subject. Based on their answers, the most frequent problems are the following ones:

- Lack of technical knowledge
- Difficulty to identify signs of internet addictive behaviour.
- The fact that this issue has a psychological background and requires special treatment/management deepening on the causes
- Difficulty in managing parents who are negative in accepting they need help
- Motivating children to non-internet related activities
- The new trends that impose the use of the internet, especially in view of lockdown
- Difficulty in finding the appropriate educational material
- Difficulty in the way in which this knowledge can be transmitted.

Due to the explosion of the digital age, Internet Addiction Disorder has been difficult to be identified, as everybody is surrounded by technology and the limits of abuse are unclear. Finally, regarding whether adult educators have some personal experience dealing with IAB, we have the following responses:

– 8 out of 10 of the participants stated that they have encountered a case of internet addiction in contexts of daily life, such as social media and online gaming addiction. They are also stating that is a common situation and some of these cases need psychological support.

- The rest 2 respondents have never had a personal experience on dealing with IAB.

As for the participants interest to attend some seminars on internet abuse and / or internet addiction, all of the respondents gave a positive answer and one of them pointed out the importance, by adding that “It is very important for educators to be able to recognize these symptoms and to provide properly training to mitigate or even prevent them from the beginning, acting pro-actively.”

The Needs of Parents/ Children

For the identification of the needs of parents and those of their children, 10 parents took part in this research and share their experiences regarding Internet Abusive Behaviour. The number of children of the participants vary from 1-6 with the most common category to be 1 child and 2 children (40% each). The average age of the children of the participants was 12 years old.

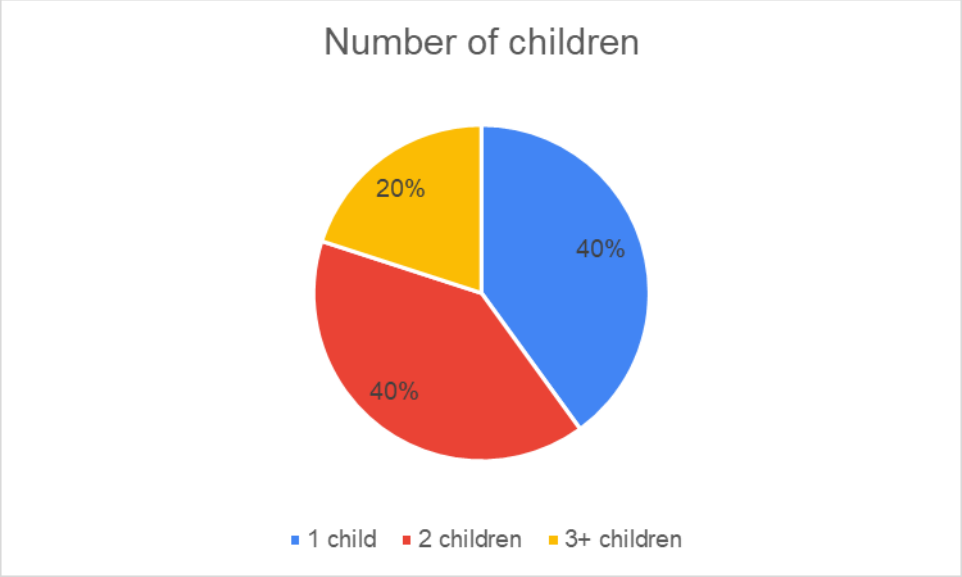

Figure 1: Number of Children

Initially, on the question "How would you describe your children's use of the internet?" 60% of the parents participated in this research believe that their children are spending excessive time on internet due to the pandemic situation, whereas only a 40% of the participants stated that the time their children spend on the internet is normal and reasonable.

In regards to the devices they are using to connect to the internet, the most common devices identified are:

- Smartphones (41%)
- Tablets (29%)
- Laptops (29%)

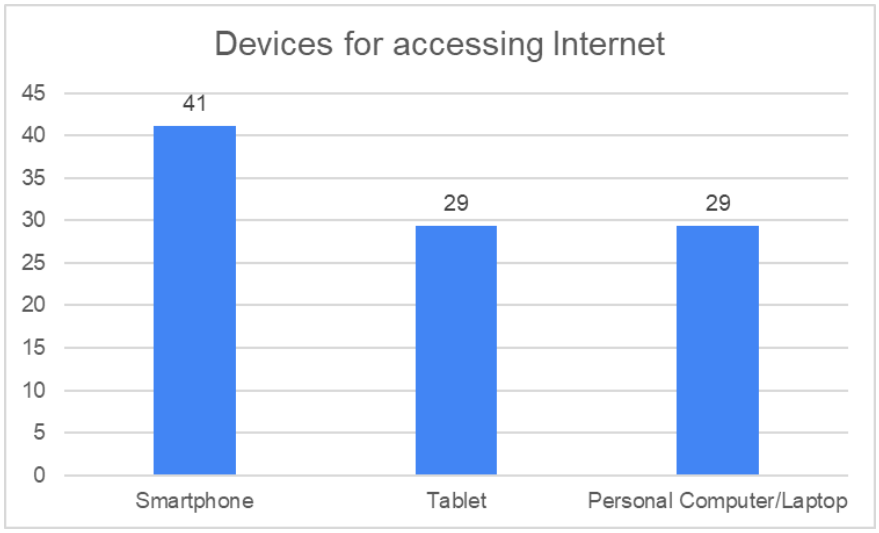

Figure 2: Devices for accessing Internet

However, exactly the half of the participants (50%) stated that their children do not have their own devices with access to the internet, but they are using the ones belong to their parents.

More specifically, 30% of the participants stated that their children spent 30min-1hour on the internet daily; 50% between 2 and 5 hours and 20% more than 5 hours. An interesting fact is that the respondents have noted that they do not include in this time the online learning activities due to schools closures during the pandemic. The following chart represents the responses.

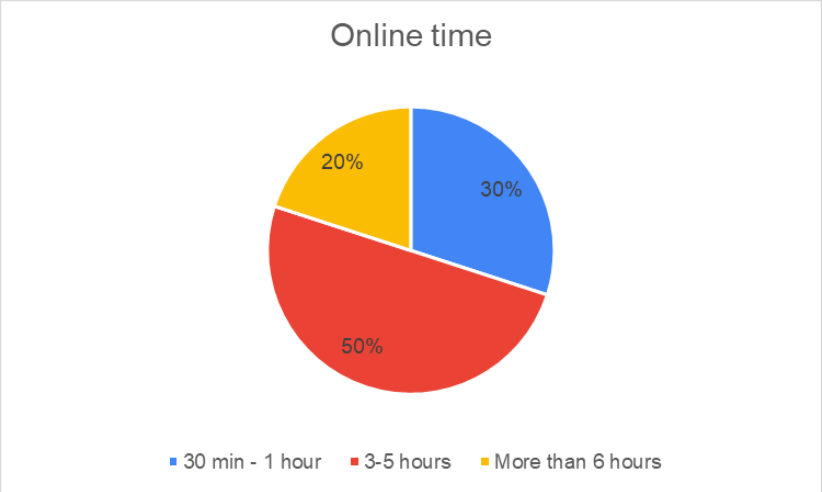

Figure 3: Online time

Regarding the spending time on offline activities, 53% of the respondents stated that the time spent is 2-4 hours a day and 46% more than 5 hours per day.

Parents identified the following activities as the most common that their children spent their time online:

- Online Gaming (35%)
- Social Media (25%)
- Online Streaming (Youtube/Netflix) (20%)
- Studying / Search for Information (20%)

Participants also have been asked whether they have set some limitations/ rules with their children to monitor their usage of the internet. 60% of the participants said that they have not set some limitations/ rules in terms of using the internet to their children, but they have made some conversation on the dangers and have left the choice to their children to act as they want. The rest 40% of the participants had set some limits such as setting time and enabling parental control to some devices. Some of the participants also mentioned that they have advice their children not to talk to strangers, not to see violence, not to show / share photos online, but not imposing these advices as “limits”.

In terms of the success of those measures, the responses varied – 50% stated that setting limitations had a positive/compensatory impact. More specifically, some statements are the following ones:

"I believe that they respect them and the way I have conveyed the dangers to them strengthens their critical thinking and does not oppress them."

"They give the child the opportunity to get bored, to find something else to do and not to limit his interests."

"These measures giving the opportunity to my children to avoid possible addiction and to use the internet as a tool and not as an escape."

However, the other 30% reported that setting limitations is not an effective strategy for them. The remaining 20% stated that they could not know if the measures are effective.

Moreover, parents have been asked whether they notice any changes in the behaviour of their children when they cannot use the internet. 61% of those who answer the question stated that they have noticed changes in behaviour. Some answers where the following ones:

- Aggressiveness
- Sleep disorder
- Verbal and behavioural manifestation of dissatisfaction
- Lack of concentration / Distraction

The remaining 31% mentioned that they have not seen any behavioural change in their children.

Furthermore, the following difficulties/ challenges have been identified by parents in their try to deal or prevent internet abusive behaviours. The more common responses were the following:

"The risks are many. Children need to develop critical thinking from an early age in order to properly process all the information and possible threats."

"Quarantine is the biggest problem right now, while children have to stay constantly in house."

"Many times my children do not listen, I do not know how to handle it."

"Limitations make us willing to negotiate. The same goes for children - they always want to test their own and their parents' limits. This causes some disagreements which sometimes are difficult to resolve."

"It is difficult to keep limits when Internet is the trend of the time, including the use of the internet for educational purposes and the habits of their friends are different from what I ask my child to do."

When respondents asked about alternative methods/strategies that they use in order to tackle excessive internet use of their children, the propose some ways that deemed the most effective. These are:

- Spending time in outdoor / creative activities.
- Scheduling and setting a flexible timetable.
- Discussion/Negotiation

Finally, all the participants expressed their willingness to learn more about topics related to internet abusive behaviour. Specifically, on topics such as:

- Symptoms and sings of Internet Abusive Behaviour
- Effects of IAB on mental and physical health
- Organisations/Entities that provide help on Internet addiction
- Internet Safety and Cyber-bullying
- Wise use of Social Media
- Online gaming addiction

Conclusion

To sum up, this report as part of the first Intellectual Output of STEPIN project provided the results of the desk research, exploring the role and the challenges of adult educators and parents that are dealing with childrens' excessive online time. It is aiming to empower them with knowledge, skills and tools to be able to recognise and deal with IAB effectively. An overview of the state of the art in the field of IAB had also presented, as well the current situation in Greece, presenting needs and gaps in dealing with this issue collecting data directly from the target groups of adult educators and parents/ children. The data collected as part of this report will support the development of the material and resources to support

both parents and adult educators to be able to deal with IAB issues and be aware of the dangers and harmful consequences of the excessive internet use while investigating prevention measures and raising the awareness of the public, bodies, stakeholders etc.

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