Institut für Didaktik der Demokratie

Leibniz Universität Hannover

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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:**

step by step
PARENTS' ASSOCIATION

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## INTRODUCTION

When we talk about the **Internet abusive behaviour (IAB),** we can talk about excessive use of the Internet and violence on the Internet.

In Croatia, the topic of violence or **cyberbullying** is relatively well researched and covered by the services of public institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

On the other hand, the topic of **excessive use of the Internet** is poorly researched and covered by services, and in this area, there is still a lot of space for that service to be developed, and as will be shown through research of attitudes and experiences of professionals and parents there is a great need.

In the following, we will present both aspects of IAB in order to get a complete picture of the situation in Croatia.

## LEGISLATIVE

In Croatia, the IAB is not regulated by any special law and / or public policy, but as a topic is an integral part of other normative regulations, rules and strategies of various stakeholders.

When talking of **abusive behaviour over the Internet**, the basic act in Croatia that provides legal protection of children and adults from criminal offenses that may be related to the use of ICT and the Internet is the **Criminal Code**.

Articles of the Criminal Code applicable in the context of protection of children on the Internet are those from the group of *criminal offenses against honour and reputation, acts of coercion, threats, public incitement to violence and hatred and criminal offenses of sexual abuse and exploitation of children through information and communication technologies*.

The Criminal Code and the **Code of Criminal Procedure** prescribe that everyone is obliged to report a criminal act committed to the detriment of a child or a minor.

The reaction of the system differs depending on the age of the perpetrator, so *children under the age of 14 are not criminally liable*, which means that a child cannot be prosecuted, sued or sentenced. However, the methods of protection against criminal activity of children are prescribed, through *legal family protection measures* implemented by the **Centre for Social Welfare** after notifying the police. Thus, the criminal behaviour of children provokes an institutional reaction in order to prevent further criminal behaviour and to take measures to protect the child from the harm that such behaviour may have on his further development.

Minors over the age of 14 are divided into two groups:

1. *Younger minors* are persons who have reached the age of 14 but are under 16 years of age. They are criminally liable. If it is established that they have committed a criminal offense, they may be imposed educational measures, namely disciplinary measures, measures of intensified supervision and institutional measures.
2. *Older minors* are persons who have reached the age of 16 but are younger than 18 years. In addition to educational measures, they may also be sentenced to juvenile imprisonment. Proceedings against a minor are initiated exclusively by the State Attorney's Office, regardless of the type and gravity of the criminal offense and the prescribed punishment.

Due to the application of the provisions of the **Juvenile Courts Act**, the age of perpetrators of criminal offenses is estimated at the time of their commission.

In this context, IAB at the highest level is within the scope of the **Ministry of the Interior**, which has two departments within the directorate that are directly related to this type of crime:

- **Department of High-Tech Crime**
- **Department of Juvenile Delinquency and Crime to the Detriment of Youth and Family**

It should also be mentioned that in 2015, the **National Cyber Security Strategy** was adopted, which in relation to this topic explicitly recognizes only the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation of children. The strategy was adopted on the basis of the **European Convention on Cybercrime**.

Cyberbullying is recognized as one of the types of violence that is being tried to be prevented through the **Action Plan for the Prevention of Violence in Schools for the period from 2020 to 2024**, within the **Ministry of Science and Education**. However, even here, the IAB is not specifically addressed but is mentioned alongside other types of violence.

All of the above is in line with the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, which states: *"A child shall not be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation."* And *"A child has right to protection against such interference or attack"*.

On the other hand, **excessive use of internet and internet addiction** is *not legally regulated*, possibly only through a provision of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child** to the right to life and development in all its forms, including mental health. In this sense, children have the opportunity for **medical and psychological support** through the public health system, which is free (and within the scope of **Ministry of Health**) and through the work of other institutions and NGOs that provide support to families in this area. This aspect will be described in more detail below.

So, as it can be already seen, excessive use of internet is highly underrated and neglected issue in Croatia.

# KEY STAKEHOLDERS

## Ministry of the Interior

As mentioned, the Ministry has departments within the directorate that deal with the issue of IAB, especially to the detriment of children. The Ministry also **includes local police administrations / stations** to which abuse is reported. The report can be made in person, by phone call, e-mail or **"Red Button"** option of direct online reporting of violence and / or privacy for oneself or the safety of another child on the Ministry's website.

## Ministry of Justice

It is in the domain of this Ministry to monitor the aforementioned laws and to make decisions and judgments with regard to committed criminal offenses or misdemeanours via the Internet. It operates through institutions such as the **State Attorney's Office, courts, youth courts, prisons and penitentiaries, educational institutions** and the like.

## Ministry of Health

The Ministry of Health is important when talking about internet abuse as excess time online, and it operates through acts, plans and recommendations, and also through various public administration bodies. An important institution is certainly the **Croatian Health Insurance Fund**, which provides free health insurance for the citizens of Croatia as well as **community health centres and hospitals** where it is possible to receive free mental health support. Another important health institution is the **Croatian Institute of Public Health**, which works through informational and educational activities and prevention, but also through the *Service for Health Promotion* more directly on the topic of mental health – including IAB.

These institutions are important in the context of prevention, information and education as well as treatment of internet addiction and work with victims of violence as well as perpetrators.

In terms of excessive time spent online or using ICT, we can highlight two institutions in particular:

- **Psychiatric Hospital of St. John** - a health institution that owns a day hospital for addictions to the Internet and video games. The hospital provides many services that will be described in more detail through an example of good practice.
- **Zagreb Child and Youth Protection Centre** - a health institution whose main purpose is to provide psychological, social, psychiatric, special education and paediatric assessment and assistance to children victims of violence and traumatic experiences and their parents. It is very active in terms of online violence as well as the time children spend online, which will also be discussed later through a review of research and good practice.

### Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy

The Ministry operates in a very wide area, and in this context its **Directorate for Family and Social Policy** and the **Institute for Social Work** are important, through which the Ministry cooperates with other relevant stakeholders in this area.

Cooperation through the **Centres for Social Welfare** and above-mentioned institutions in this area with the sectors of internal affairs, justice, health and cooperation with non-governmental organizations operating in this area, related to family law protection measures, is crucial.

### Ministry of Science and Education

The Ministry acts informatively and educationally, primarily through **public educational institutions** that are free for all children, but also by approving the curriculum of private schools. Also, all educational institutions have a **professional service in the field of development and mental health** that takes care of the mental health of children and youth

and follow the mentioned *Action Plan for the Suppression of Violence*, part of which is the suppression of violence via the Internet.

It is also important to mention **CARNET - Croatian Academic and Research Network**, a public institution that operates within the Ministry in the field of information and communication technology and its application in education. In the field of IAB, it is informative and educational, but it also has a service that protects its users by receiving and processing reports related to computer security incidents and misuse of CARNET resources.

### Personal Data Protection Agency

The Agency operates in this area in the context of **personal data protection** and encouraging children and young people to be safe on the Internet through the publication of educational materials.

### Office of the Ombudsperson for Children

The Ombudsperson for Children is a special and supervisory body with the task of **protecting, monitoring and promoting the rights and interests of children**. In this sense, the Ombudsperson can promote and encourage stronger protection of children's rights that are valid in the online world.

### Other

In addition to public institutions, in the field of information, education and prevention, there are very strong NGOs in Croatia, especially in terms of providing free and widely available services. In this area we can especially emphasize:

### Brave phone

Brave Phone is an NGO established with the aim of providing direct assistance to abused and neglected children and their families, but also works on the prevention of abuse and neglect as well as unacceptable behaviour of children and youth.

Brave Phone is dedicated to the topic of IAB through several projects, for example through the **Brave Guardians** project. The main goal of the project is to provide professional and effective information to children, teachers and parents about the forms and methods of using the Internet, as well as the forms of occurrence and effective ways of protection against violence via the Internet. Users of the program enrich their knowledge about the participation and use of modern technologies, and in addition to actively acquiring knowledge, they also acquire the skills of recognizing and protecting against unwanted content. The program will be presented in more detail through a presentation of good practices.

The association, alongside **Zagreb Child and Youth Protection Centre**, conducted a *series of researches* on this topic, which will be presented later in the text.

### Centre for Missing and Exploited Children

The Centre for Missing and Exploited Children is an NGO that has been active for over ten years in the field of protecting children from abuse and sexual exploitation via the Internet.

The Centre works with children in treatment, has launched a national telephone number for missing children and is a coordinator of the **Centre for Safer Internet**. The Centre for Safer Internet (**csi.hr**) is the Croatian national centre for child safety on the internet, founded in 2012. The most important services it provides are the *helpline*, the possibility of anonymous reporting of illegal content on the Internet (*hotline*) and the *educational platform* for children, parents and experts **sini.hr**

**Click Worth Security** is a public campaign presented last year by the Centre for Missing and Exploited Children, alongside which the **Netica** (**www.netica.hr**) platform was created, where educational materials published as part of the campaign, a picture book for preschool children and a workbook for primary school children can be found.

## Parents' Association Step by step

The Parents' Association Step by Step joined the **#DeleteCyberbullying** project in 2013, implemented by the Confederation of Family Organizations of the European Union (**COFACE**) with the financial support of the European Union's DAPHNE program. The aim of the project was to inform children and young people and their parents and teachers about Internet safety, forms of cyberbullying and electronic violence, as well as sources of help. In 2015, the Association published a manual **"We are the system"** as part of the project **Empowering the Right of Children to be Safe**, funded by the European Union. The aim of the project was to revise the existing needs of children in order to increase their safety from all forms of violence, and the publication provided a detailed overview of regulations in the field of child protection, including on the Internet. As part of the project, a research was conducted, which will be described in more detail later.

Currently, within the Erasmus + strategic partnership, and since 2019, within the project - **STOP - prevention of sexual violence against children and youth through effective training and application of augmented reality** - the Association as a project coordinator, together with 6 partner organizations from different European countries also covers various forms of IAB - grooming, sexting, revenge pornography, etc. During 2020, a series of webinars on these and other topics were held and had great reach (around 100 young people) via social media where webinars where broadcasted.

## UNICEF

It is important to mention **UNICEF** as an international organization dedicated to children's rights, which also operates in Croatia. Given that the misuse of the Internet is one of the major problems of today, UNICEF is committed to this issue, although mostly focused on *violence on the Internet through research and educational activities*. The research will be mentioned below, and educational materials can be found on their website.

## SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

In Croatia, the topic of Internet abuse has been repeatedly researched by key stakeholders, but with an *emphasis on the time and manner of spending time on the Internet and violence on the Internet*.

**Brave Phone and the Zagreb Child and Youth Protection Centre** have conducted several such studies that show that *most young people have devices for Internet access as well as unlimited Internet access*, which has increased over the years. Young people spend much of their time online, most often on social media, although they would rather spend it with friends in person. A large number of young people encountered or were sent inappropriate or violent content, which was mostly accompanied by unpleasant feelings.

Their first study in 2004 was largely focused on determining the **prevalence of children's exposure to unwanted sexual material on the Internet and their reactions**. The results of the research showed that 27% of children were exposed to messages with sexual content. One third of these children did not confide their experience of receiving messages with sexual content to anyone, and those who confided most often did so: friends (52%) and parents (17%). Girls are more likely to immediately delete or close incoming messages than boys (53% vs. 24%). Boys more often go to the websites offered (20% vs. 5%).

A quarter of children who were exposed to messages with sexual content stated that they had a disturbing emotional reaction, more often girls (47%, boys - 19%) and younger children.

These organizations repeated the survey in 2008, this time with a greater emphasis on **cyberbullying**. Almost all children included in the survey (95%) state that they have a computer (desktop or laptop) at home, and 85% of them state that they have internet access at home. When asked about the frequency of Internet use, *49% of children and youth state that they use the Internet every day*.

Not surprisingly, as many as *97% of children and young people in the sample state that they own their own mobile phone*. However, the following data are worrying:

- 16% of participants received a disturbing or threatening message via mobile phone
- 10% received a message of pornographic and sexual content without wanting to
- 8% of children and young people reported sending harassing and threatening messages to someone's mobile phone
- 3% of them stated that they sent pornographic and/or sexual content to someone, even though they knew that person did not want to see it
- 23% of children and young people stated that they took pictures and / or filmed their peers with a mobile phone in a fight or other violent behaviour

The results show that, luckily, 78% of children and young people in the sample believe that harassment, threats and receiving sexual messages via mobile phones and the Internet should be reported.

The research was conducted by these two institutions in 2014 on **the experiences and behaviours of children on the Internet and on Facebook**, which showed:

- 99% of children have Internet access at home or at school
- 93% of surveyed children and young people have a Facebook profile
- 68% of children and young people opened a FB profile before the age of 13
- 53% of children and young people have more than 300 friends on Facebook
- 47% of participants visit Facebook during classes

The data also shows other disturbing trends:

- 69% of children and young people visit Facebook several times a day, 15% once a day
- 47% of children and young people spend 1-2 hours a day on Facebook, and 19% spend 3 or more hours on Facebook

Children and young people who spend 3 or more hours a day on Facebook have lower school achievement than children who spend less than half an hour a day on Facebook, have a more distorted image of themselves and show a greater number of emotional and behavioural difficulties. Also, children who are victims or perpetrators of violence through Facebook have lower school achievement than their peers and a greater number of emotional and behavioural difficulties.

On the other hand, especially interesting is the finding that *as many as 83% of children who spend most of their free time on the Internet would rather spend time with friends (62%) or play sports / leisure activities (21%).*

The results of the national research project **"Social online experiences and mental health of young people"** conducted by these organizations in 2019 show that almost all adolescents have access to the Internet from home (99.5%), 95.1% via mobile phone and 77.9% at school. One in every three adolescents uses social networks for 3 to 5 hours a day, and one in five adolescents uses them for more than 5 hours a day.

As soon as the notification arrives, almost 50% adolescents check social networks immediately, 30% checks them several times a day, and 20% adolescents checks their social media CONSTANTLY, regardless of whether the notification has arrived or not. Of all social networks, most young people use YouTube - 97.7%, followed by Instagram - 92.6%, WhatsApp - 88.7%, Snapchat - 63.2% and Facebook Messenger - 50.6%.

On the other hand, this data also shows that young people would prefer (64% of them) to spend time with friends compared to social networks (4.7%), while 41.7% of them really spend free time with friends, while as many as 24.5 % of them spend most of their free time on social networks.

As stated earlier, in 2015 the **Parents' Association Step by Step** conducted a research as part of the project **Empowering the Right of Children to be Safe**, funded by the European Union, in the field of protecting children from all types of violence, including on the Internet. The results showed that 55.5% of young people believe that girls were insulted on the internet, 23.6% of young people estimated that most or almost all of the girls had their identity stolen, and 30.7% that most girls were sexually harassed online. For boys, they are convinced that all these forms of violence are far less common.

Expert focus group findings indicate that online violence is not yet sufficiently recognized as violence, especially not at the level of regulations. For example, judicial experts state:

*"I would single out the absence of provisions of the law that regulate contemporary problems and ways of child abuse. This category includes, among others, online abuse, various dating portals, social networks, as well as the problem of hacked games that ultimately serve to spy on and gather information from children; I certainly think cyberbullying should be regulated."*

The problem of the legal unregulation of violence on the Internet is also recognized by health professionals:

*"You know what, in principle, this law, this law should be written by the people who actually see where the issue is and see what needs to change. And to be more applicable, that's what's important – to follow the experience. And also, to think about how are you going to "punish it", how are you going to do something?"*

The next relevant study was conducted by **UNICEF** in 2010 on children between the ages of 10 and 15 as part of the **"Break the Chain!"** Project. The findings showed that almost all children own a mobile phone, their household owns a computer, while 85% of children have access to the Internet. 50% of children access the internet every day.

To the greatest extent, children consume entertaining content (music, correspondence, social networks) and generally express more positive attitudes towards the Internet compared to their parents or teachers. For example, children are more likely to agree with statements that access to the Internet makes life easier for them and that it would be difficult for them to live without it. On the other hand, they are less inclined to agree with statements about how modern technologies corrupt or dumb people down and how their use should be limited. However, research has also shown that children who experience online violence view modern technologies less positively than children who do not experience it, as well as children who commit it.

The research also showed that parents and teachers have a relatively negative view of spending time online compared to children - they believe that it is conducive to inappropriate behaviour and that time can be better spent in other ways.

The frequency of experiencing electronic and non-electronic violence was statistically significant and relatively highly correlated ($\rho = 0.499$; $p < 0.01$). In other words, to a certain extent, *children who suffer non-electronic violence more often are also victims of electronic violence*. This data warns of the connection between electronic and non-electronic violence and *confirms the existence of a certain profile of children who are more often victims of abuse*. Changing the media does not significantly change the core of the relationship between the abused and those who abuse.

Among students who suffer from electronic violence (2-3 times a month and more often), i.e. abused, almost 40% of children experience it via Facebook or other social network, and more than 30% via SMS. It would be interesting to see how this ratio has changed given the growth in the number and popularity of other social networks.

The results confirm expectations and show that the largest number of children most often react to electronic violence with unpleasant feelings. Almost three quarters of children who experience violence often or very often feel angry (74.67%), upset (71.49%) and anxious (70.18%). Half of abused children do not want to go to school (50.00%) and feel bad with headaches and stomach aches (40.67%), and more than half have difficulty concentrating at home and at school (61.06%). Almost 40% of abused children experience sleep disturbances and decreased appetite at the same time.

Strong reactions are much more common in children who suffer abuse than in those who are occasionally exposed to violence. Almost half of children who suffer abuse (2-3 times a month and more often) feel intense anger because of the violence they experience, and more than a third feel strong anxiety and worry, and greater difficulty concentrating. Strong sleep difficulties and decreased appetite are felt by about 15% of children who suffer abuse.

The last research we will mention is the one on the basis of which the latest **EUkidsonline** report was created, a project of the **London School of Economics and Political Science**, in which Croatia also participated with data from 2017-2019. The data in the national report, **HRkidsonline**, refer to children aged 9 to 17, and the main findings are:

- Children most often access the Internet via smartphones.
- Almost half of children aged 9 to 11, 2/3 of children aged 12 to 14 and 3/4 of children aged 15 to 17 can access the Internet whenever they want or need to.

- Almost 30% of children aged 9 to 17 has communicated online with people they have not met live in the last year (since the survey was conducted).
- Over 10% of children aged 9 to 17 have met a person they met online live in the last year.
- In the past year, more than half of children aged 9 to 17 have received a hurtful or inappropriate message. More than 1/3 of children aged 9 to 11, almost 1/2 of children aged 12 to 14 and almost 3/4 of children aged 15 to 17 received such a message. Children who spent more time online during the week and over the weekend were more likely to receive such messages.
- Nearly 2/3 of children aged 9 to 17 have seen photos or a video of sexual content on the internet in the past year without intending to see them.
- Parents are more likely to discuss online activities with younger children. At the same time, parents are much more likely to monitor younger children's online activities, but they are also more likely to give younger children advice on what to do if someone is harassing them online.

The findings of the Croatian part of the research indicate that the largest number of children in Croatia have **free and unlimited access to the Internet through their own devices**. A large proportion of children have encountered **unwanted content**, and the number of children who are exposed to them frequently is concerning, as well as the feelings that are subsequently expressed. At the same time, children are **uncritically positive** about the opportunities offered by the Internet, and there is a great need for education and teaching children and young people about their safety and possible risks. The main goal of the education is to support children and young people in order to learn as early as possible and as successfully as possible to control the content they encounter on the Internet, and to be able to cope with potentially unpleasant and disturbing situations.

# GOOD PRACTICES

| | |
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| Title | **Red Button** |
| Location | Croatia |
| Organisation/Institution | **Ministry of the Interior** |
| Contact Data | Ulica grada Vukovara 33, 10 000 Zagreb<br>(+385) 1 6122 111<br>pitanja@mup.hr<br>https://mup.gov.hr |
| Target Group/Context | Red Button is the ability to electronically report inappropriate content online. It is widely available to all Internet users in the Republic of Croatia, and especially intended for children and young people. Upon reporting, public services operate. |
| Content/Learning Outcomes | The consequence of the report is the action of public services and the protection of the citizens of the Republic of Croatia. |
| Description of the Process | Upon reporting, an investigation is conducted by the services of the Ministry of the Interior, and if necessary, the Ministry of Justice is involved (in case of criminal offense and trial, the need to carry out an educational measure or criminal offense) and the Ministry of Health (to provide support to the victim's mental health). |
| Resources needed | Only public institutions have the capacity to implement this activity. |
| Evaluation of the Methodology | The aim of the practice is to protect the citizens of the Republic of Croatia, and the effect is monitored according to the number of processed and resolved applications. |

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| Title | **Brave Guardians** |
| Location | Zagreb, Croatia |

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| Organisation/Institution | **Brave Phone** |
| Contact Data | Trg svibanjskih žrtava 1995. br 2, 10 000 Zagreb<br>(+385) 1 3793 000<br>info@hrabritelefon.hr<br>https://udruga.hrabritelefon.hr |
| Target Group/Context | The main purpose of the project is to empower children, parents and schools as a community in responding to the challenges of electronic violence, which, unlike peer violence, has stronger consequences because it is a written word that remains on the Internet, available to an unlimited number children, is quickly transmitted, and the perpetrator may remain anonymous. Accordingly, the basic idea is to raise awareness and empower target groups (children, professional associates and parents) in areas important for children's psychosocial development, understanding their own responsibilities and power in stopping electronic violence, and understanding the dangers of Internet abuse. |
| Content/Learning Outcomes | Educated children, parents and school staff on ending on line violence. Children educated for a role of peer “guardian”. |
| Description of the Process | As part of the project, an online version of the memory game was developed, educational materials were printed and distributed to schools (500 “Safe Surfing” brochures for each school), and focus groups were conducted with students and teachers to gather information related to this topic. Also, a one-day training of teachers and professional associates was held in each school, which included strengthening their competencies in the field of prevention of electronic violence, and a lecture was held for parents on the same topic. Workshops for children are also planned and designed, which will be conducted by educated teachers / professional associates with children. After the workshops, children are called "Brave Guardians" and thus take an active role in stopping electronic violence through peer support. |
| Resources needed | Workshops, collaboration with schools, interested children and parents |
| Evaluation of the Methodology | The project is internally evaluated. |

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| Title | **Netica.hr**<br>**csi.hr**<br>**sini.hr** |
| Location | Croatia |
| Organisation/Institution | **The Centre for Missing and Exploited Children** |
| Contact Data | J. J. Strossmayera 1/1,<br>31000 Osijek, Hrvatska<br>(+385) 31 272 943<br>info@cnzd.org<br>https://cnzd.org<br>https://csi.hr<br>https://sini.hr<br>https://www.netica.hr |
| Target Group/Context | The csi.hr is intended for a wide population of children and parents who can get support through the helpline when they face inappropriate content and abuse of the Internet, and can report the same through the hotline.<br>Sini.hr is an educational platform intended for children, parents and professionals. Part of the platform are webinars on the topic of Internet abuse, Internet security, as well as Internet addiction and modern technologies. After listening to the webinars, it is possible to take a test and get an informal diploma.<br>Netica.hr is an educational portal intended for children through which they can learn how to use modern technologies responsibly. |
| Content/Learning Outcomes | All these platforms are intended to inform children, young people, parents and professionals on the topics of Internet abuse, Internet violence, Internet addiction and modern technologies.<br>They provide the ability to report unwanted content and seek psychological support if any of the users face unwanted content. |
| Description of the Process | The portals consist of a series of articles, videos, games and tests, and webinars. |

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| | After completing the webinar, it is possible to take a test and get an informal diploma. |
| Resources needed | Domains, web design professionals, people who can maintain websites, designers and content developers, mental health professionals, collaboration with public institutions. |
| Evaluation of the Methodology | The projects are internally evaluated. |

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| Title | **Multidisciplinary treatment of children and families** |
| Location | Zagreb, Hrvatska |
| Organisation/Institution | **Zagreb Child and Youth Protection Centre** |
| Contact Data | Zagreb, Đorđićeva 26<br>(+385) 1 34 575 18<br>info@poliklinika-djeca.hr<br>https://www.poliklinika-djeca.hr |
| Target Group/Context | The activity of the Polyclinic is to provide multidisciplinary psychological, social, psychiatric, special education and paediatric assessment and assistance to children with various traumatic experiences, as well as their parents.<br>The support is provided by a multi-member team in the premises of the Polyclinic in Zagreb.<br>The specialists of the Polyclinic also provide educational and supervisory services to other professionals who work with children and parents. |
| Content/Learning Outcomes | multidisciplinary psychological, social, psychiatric, special education and paediatric assessments and assistance, forensics, education and supervision of experts |
| Description of the Process | The experts of the Polyclinic perform diagnostic processing on each child who is involved in the work. According to the results of the processing, the child and |

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| | parents are included in the multidisciplinary treatment with all the necessary experts, as well as materials for the work. |
| Resources needed | Adequate functioning requires a fully equipped space available to the Centre. More multidisciplinary teams are needed (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, rehabilitators, speech therapists, etc.) as well as other staff that enables the functioning of the institution. It is necessary to further educate the team in the field of diagnostics, forensics, therapeutic directions, etc. It is necessary to have diagnostic and therapeutic materials. |
| Evaluation of the Methodology | The Centre is a public health institution and is thus under the supervision of the Ministry of Health. The programs and projects of the Polyclinic are additionally evaluated. |

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| Title | **Multidisciplinary treatment of children and families** |
| Location | Zagreb, Hrvatska |
| Organisation/Institution | **Psychiatric Hospital of St. John** |
| Contact Data | Jankomir 11, pp 68, 10 090 Zagreb<br>01/3430 000<br>pbsvi@pbsvi.hr<br>http://www.pbsvi.hr |
| Target Group/Context | Day hospital for internet and video game addiction is open to anyone who needs help and support. |
| Content/Learning Outcomes | The activities of the day hospital are:<br>• Psychoeducation through lectures, workshops and exercises<br>• Group psychotherapeutic work<br>• Support groups with older abstainers |

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| | • Individual conversations with a therapist<br>• Involvement of the family in the process of establishing and maintaining abstinence (possibly controlled use)<br>• Relaxation techniques (progressive muscle relaxation)<br>• Sociotherapeutic activities (excursions, sports activities, creative workshops, movies)<br>• Activities of the therapeutic community<br>• Pharmacotherapeutic support as needed (medicines)<br>• Life skills training<br>• Help in structuring free time<br>• Cognitive-behavioral therapy<br>• Routine laboratory tests<br>• Program evaluation activities<br>• Other searches, examinations and activities as needed |
| Description of the Process | To be involved in the activity you need to be referred by your family doctor. After the indication interview, the person is included in the day hospital group. The duration of a day hospital is usually up to three months, every working day in the morning.<br>In addition to the day hospital program, patients engage in multi-family group psychotherapy with their loved ones. Upon completion of the program, it is planned to continue treatment through family therapy once a week and outpatient follow-up according to individual needs.<br>The program adapts to the needs of patients |
| Resources needed | Adequate functioning requires a fully equipped space available to the hospital. More multidisciplinary teams are needed (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, rehabilitators, speech therapists, etc.) as well as other staff that enables the functioning of the institution. It is necessary to further educate the team in the field of diagnostics, forensics, therapeutic directions, etc. It is necessary to have diagnostic and therapeutic materials. |
| Evaluation of the Methodology | PB is a public health institution and is thus under the supervision of the Ministry of Health. PB programs and projects are further evaluated. |

# RESEARCH RESULTS

## RESEARCH RESULTS - EXPERTS

As part of the project, an **online survey of the attitudes and experiences of experts** working with children, young people and families on the topic of Internet abuse was conducted. The qualitative research involved 10 experts who shared their experiences and needs in the field.

In addition to 7 psychologists, the questionnaire was completed by one pedagogue, one social pedagogue and one political scientist. They are employed in non-governmental organizations, kindergartens, schools and teaching institutes. They work in the area from 3 to 34 years with an even distribution of years of work experience.

Participants state that they mostly work with children (general population, but also children with developmental disabilities and behavioural disorders), young people and parents. They state that they also work with educational staff. Approximately **50% of professionals regularly encounter the topic of abuse of the Internet and / or modern technologies**.

The majority (80%) of experts participated in trainings on this topic. They were mostly educated through **webinars and video lectures** as well as reading **scientific articles**. Approximately 50% of experts also conducted lectures or trainings mostly intended for users (children, youth and parents). However, most of these were topics of danger lurking on the Internet, and to a much lesser extent related to the excessive use of the Internet and modern technologies. Participants point out that there is a **great need for education** in this area and that **younger children should be included**.

Half of the experts believe that they are well acquainted with the topic, while the rest assess their knowledge as mediocre and insufficient, which confirms the need for further education.

As **problems in this area point** out:

- Attractiveness of screens for children in comparison with which all other activities are less attractive (dopamine action of likes - it is easy to remove screens, but how to replace them)
- Screens make life easier for parents - it is important to convince them that screens are not good for children. Screens are introduced too early and habits are formed much earlier than adolescence, we should systematically promote as little time in front of screens as possible, especially for small children, but this is difficult due to parental overload and high digitalization of everything around us.
- General addiction difficulties, but also easier relapse - it's hard to avoid screens in real life and find a balance between a need and an addiction
- Specifics of treatment of children and youth addicted to the Internet, in general, specifics of treatment of addiction
- Constantly changing areas and the challenges that threaten, it is difficult to keep up with children and young people in this area

All participants would like to participate again in education related to these topics, and see as ideal **learning outcomes**:

- Greater knowledge of legislation (related to online violence)
- What are the risks and how to reduce the damage, how to identify them and protect the children
- Introduction to new and changing challenges - games, social networks, etc.
- How to replace screens
- How many hours of internet a day is appropriate at what age - and under what conditions

- How to establish healthy parental control over Internet use; how to have an insight into what a child is doing online without completely invading their privacy
- How to educate a child to protect themselves from unwanted contacts on the Internet (this applies to contacts via social networks)
- Experiences and challenges in treatment work, techniques of working with families with this problem
- Prevention, detection and treatment of internet addiction

If they were the presidents of their organizations, i.e., the decisionmaker on implementation of programs on this topic, they would be engaged to **pay more attention to this topic starting with small children (preschool age)**, especially through work with parents and educators. They believe that there is a **lack of equal regional representation** on this topic and that it is necessary to organize **readily available materials** for the target group, but also educators as materials for work.

## SURVEY RESULTS - PARENTS

The **survey of parents' attitudes and experiences** involved 15 parents between the ages of 36 and 50, and all have at least one child between the ages of 10 and 21, mostly two.

They all say that their **children have unlimited access to the Internet from multiple devices**. All households have mobile phones, tablets, laptops and computers, most of them. Also, all **children have their own cell phones** with access to tablets and computers.

The majority (7) of parents estimate that children spend **4 to 8 hours a day on the Internet**, slightly less (5) to spend **2 to 4 hours**, while some parents report worrying **over 8 hours a day in front of screens**. All parents, regardless of the objective number, believe that children spend too much time online, but cite online school as an objective problem in this area due to

the current situation of the COVID pandemic, which drastically increases the time spent in front of screens. It is clear from the answers how worried they are about the time children spend online as well as the fact that most of their life and socialization takes place in the digital world, but at the moment they do not see how to get around it.

Parents of younger children have **rules related to time spent online as well as content**, while parents of older children (over 15 years of age) mostly do not set any rules or restrictions. Most of them think that the **rules have an effect** (or they had when they had them) and the children mostly stick to the agreement. One mother says that all the rules they had before the lockdown no longer make sense.

Regarding **changes in time-related behaviour on the Internet**, parents state:

- Children spend more time on line. "When he gets off from the computer, he has a mobile phone in his hands. If there were no restrictions, he would be using devices all day long."
- Occasional "mental blockages"
- Changing day for night
- Language skills weaker, language changes, English is used more, shorter sentences
- They lack social interactions
- Affects self-control
- When less controlled, they become more distracted, restless, irritable and also sleep and eat less
- Cruel in communication when interrupted in game or in a bad mood because they didn’t do well as a character in the game
- Absence, greater need for solitude
- Slowness in performing duties
- Visual impairment

- Lack of interest for everyday life
- Inability to concentrate

As **challenges they face when trying to intervene** in this behaviour, they state:

- Complaints
- Arguing
- Outbursts of anger and quarrels
- Challenges in communication
- Pressure from other children who spend more time on line playing violent games

However, everyone states that lockdown(s), self-isolation and online school prevent them from serious interventions because children have arguments to be online, and they are overwhelmed - everyone is trying to survive this period. They are concerned about the psychological, emotional and social development of children and how they will emerge from the pandemic situation.

Several parents state that the child is „saved“ by their interest in sport or similar activities. Without socializing and spending time outdoor they would spend all of their time on line.

As for the known strategies, they state:

- Demand more from children in other segments of life, daily work obligations
- Alternative activities - involvement in sports, creative and / or artistic activities, board games, family time in nature
- Agreed rules, be consistent and persistent in limiting time.
- Conversations about online behaviour, especially on social networks and the content they consume

Some parents never blocs internet access or content – they try to check in and develop mutual trust. On the other hand, some parents say they punish children with withdrawing internet access (for bad grades and similar).

The **biggest needs** in this area are:

- Educate children about everything related to online safety.
- Organized activities for young people in small groups of different content
- Motivation for reading and similar activities
- How to separate the child from ICT in a "nice" way
- How to reduce time spent online once the situation becomes “more normal” and more like life than before.
- More uniform practice of all parents in limiting time spent on line, especially playing video games
- Greater control over content and time. How to give the child some freedom, but again do not overdo it. Finding balance.
- Better communication skills within the family
- School - rules about school and the Internet

## CONCLUSION

In Croatia, the problem of excessive time on line by children and young people is great, especially in the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, but a systematically very poorly recognized problem.

There are few key stakeholders in that sector and only a few organizations that provide services in this area, of which only couple are widely available while the others are **centralized in the capital of Croatia**.

Experts as well as parents show **great concern about the excessive use of the Internet**, and see the **needs in this area**:

- Limiting screen time from an early age
- Support in organizing activities that can "replace" screens
- Educating and supporting parents in taking time for themselves so they don't use screens as an opportunity to take a break
- Achieving healthy amount of parental control
- Adapting activities and content to the conditions of the pandemic and increased digitalization

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