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INTERNET AND MENTAL HEALTH OF ADOLESCENTS

Abstract. Today's generations of adolescents have grown up with information and communication technologies which have a significant place in their lives. One of the important issues in this context is the relation between the Internet and the mental health of adolescents. The first topic that this paper deals with, is the relationship between the use of the Internet and mental health, and the other is related to the planned use of the Internet for the purpose of improving wellbeing. The most common activity of young people on the Internet is social networking. Online social networks can positively affect wellbeing through facilitating self-disclosing and the availability of social support. Such findings from empirical research support the ideas of theories that emphasize the positive aspects of online relating. However, social networks (and online communication in general) can also have significant negative effects on the mental health of adolescents, if they are exposed to cyberbullying. The second topic of the paper is the planned use of the Internet for the purpose of improving mental health. To young people (and to members of other age groups, as well) online support groups are the most accessible nowadays, aimed at supporting a group of people with a common problem or life challenge. These forums are most often text-based and this kind of communication has a number of potential benefits for users. It is also possible to organize online interventions that

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promote mental health and prevent its deterioration. Research shows that online skill-based interventions can have a positive impact on adolescent mental health. The results of the online prevention interventions indicate the encouraging evidence concerning computerized cognitive behavioral therapy interventions and their impact on adolescent's anxiety and depression symptoms. Although it contains potentially negative aspects, the Internet has a positive significance and potential for the development of adolescents.

KEYWORDS: net generation, mental health, social networking, cyberbullying, online social support groups.

Nowadays, one of the most exciting social, as well as romantic, sites to visit is cyberspace.

Aaron Ben-Ze'ev

INTRODUCTION

The widespread use of the Internet has significantly changed almost all segments of life. Social interactions, learning modes, entertainment and privacy are just some of the domains that have been transformed by the Internet. A new 'world' has been created, a new space in which a large number of people are visiting every day, at least for a short time. In this cyberspace, adolescents stay significantly more often and longer than any other age group.

For many years educational experts have been discussing the new generations of learners who enter our educational institutions. They have grown up with information and communication technologies (ICT)[2] as an integral part of their everyday lives. In the more economically developed countries, generations that are distinguished by familiarity and reliance on ICT were identified already at the transition from the 20th to the 21st century. Prensky (Prensky, 2001a) calls them 'digital natives', and the term 'Net Generation' is also common (Tapscott, 1998). Their lives are described as immersed in technology, "surrounded by and using

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[2] Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications. It is similar to Information Technology (IT), but focuses primarily on communication technologies. This includes the Internet, wireless networks, cell phones, and other communication mediums. (definition from https://techterms.com/definition/ict)

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computers, video games, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all other toys and tools of the digital age" (Prensky, 2001a, p. 1). They are also held to be active experiential learners, proficient in multitasking, and dependent on ICT for accessing information and for communicating with others (Frand, 2000; Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005; Prensky, 2001a, b, Tapscott, 1999). In fact, as Bennett and Maton (2010) point out, there are many different views on digital natives ranging from expressions of grave concern about the lack of socialization and poor interaction skills, the Internet addiction and cyberbullying, to idealizations of a new generation of highly motivated, highly technologized learners. In this paper, we will show some research results that reveal the connection between the Internet and the mental health of adolescents. In the first part of the text we will deal with the results of research that studied the relationship between the use of the Internet and various aspects of mental health, and in the second part, with using the Internet for the purpose of improving mental health. Our intention is to make this survey informative and useful to all professionals working with adolescents in schools.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE USE OF THE INTERNET AND THE MENTAL HEALTH OF ADOLESCENTS

The Internet provides a very wide range of content and activities, so it is difficult to give an estimate as to the use of the Internet in general. On the whole, positive aspects of use are access to information, communication, social networks, entertainment, as well as online shopping. For adolescents, the Internet is a useful source of information when they search for topics related to homework, social events, their interests and hobbies, or topics regarding health and sexuality (Bezinović, Roviš, Rončević & Bilajac, 2015). However, by far the most common way of spending time online among adolescents is social networking. Social networking sites (SNS) are defined as "websites that make it possible to form online communities and share user-created content" (Kim, Jeong, & Lee, 2010). The popularity of online communication using social media technology (SMT) is such that we can even talk about the 'science of networks' (Watts, 2007). Data obtained on the American population

show that 82% of people aged 18–29, who have access to the Internet, use Facebook (Duggan, 2015), which is the most popular social network. Findings from the 'EU Kids Online' survey show that SNS and sharing of content online are among the top four most popular online activities undertaken by children on a daily basis, and the most important activity for 13- to 16-year-olds (O'Neill & Staksrud, 2014). In Serbia, according to the data of Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia in the year of 2016 – 64.7 percent of households have access to the Internet, which is more often accessed by telephone (76.5%) than computers (72%); data on the Internet users aged 16 to 24 show that 90 percent of them have accounts on social networks (*Upotreba informaciono-komunikacionih tehnologija u Republici Srbiji, 2016*). In respect of the degree of this exposure, many researchers (not to mention parents) have wondered about the relationship of online social media technology and young people's psychological and social wellbeing.

A recent review study deals with this very issue – a relation between online communication, social media and adolescent wellbeing (Best, Manktelow & Taylor, 2014). By reviewing the scientific publications database, the authors included 43 original studies presenting empirical research in their final analysis of database (the database did not include papers that dealt with the Internet, but at the same time did not include variables related to interactive online communication with others). What did the analysis of these studies show?

BENEFITS OF ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING

Among 43 studies, 13 contained results concerning beneficial outcomes regarding SMT and communication (Best, Manktelow & Taylor, 2014). Most of these benefits are indirect and relate to perceived social support. The authors explain that the increased use of social networks raises self-esteem and feelings of belonging which may then indirectly affect feelings of wellbeing.

Nevertheless, one needs to keep in mind that perceived online social support can provide a false sense of security. On the other hand, it was found that direct emotional and empathetic support via online networks can contribute to lowering barriers to self-disclosure. This is explained by increased anonymity and reduced non-verbal inhibitors, which facilitates the process of

seeking help. Self-disclosing leads to positive feedback, which can increase feelings of being integrated into community and having social support. These are processes that most likely explain the relationship between SMT and increased wellbeing. Authors (Best, Manktelow & Taylor, 2014) also consider that online disclosure can benefit stigmatized groups (such as LGBT people or people with mental health difficulties) by enabling and encouraging their contact with mental health resources. This technology may also be more appealing to young males, being a more fashionable form of help seeking. There are also studies that show that a certain amount of risk exposure online has been useful in building resilience in adolescents (Livingstone & Görzig, 2014). SNS and communication using emails, chats, forums and discussion groups enable new friendships and the creation of social groups and contribute to the development of personal identity (Gross, Juvonen & Gable, 2002). Adolescents who do not use the Internet might lag behind their peers in the development of such positive attitudes and traits and are in danger of being rejected from their group (Hinduja, & Patchin, 2008a).

THEORIES EMPHASIZING THE POSITIVE ASPECTS OF ONLINE RELATING

Empirical findings largely support theoretical ideas about what are the positive aspects of online communication in general. The 'disinhibition effect', as explained by Suler (2004) occurs when people are able to be more anonymous, which is typically more achievable online than in face-to-face communication. When a person perceives his/her anonymity, he/she feels freer to be honest and emotionally open, to present personal information about him/herself – that is, self-disclosure is being reported by empirical findings. This online behavior can be liberating and empowering; in this case it is discussed of 'benign disinhibition' (Suler, 2004). However, it should be noted that not all self-disclosures are empowering. Suler argues that sometimes people online are extremely rude or angry. Freed from anonymity, people on the Internet can really be rude, taunting and unpleasant, and even on the most ingenious of the occasions, for example, because someone disagrees with their musical taste or does not know spelling/ histo-

ry/film as well as they do. Suler (2004) describes this disinhibition as 'toxic disinhibition'.

Other researchers/theorists as well discuss a very similar phenomenon, but take a different view. Suler talks about the process – disinhibition, while McKenna (McKenna & Bargh, 2000; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002) speaks of the outcome – presenting the 'true' self. The Internet provides a safer space to disclose 'core' aspects about one's self, and, more importantly, those can be aspects that a person hesitates to display in an 'offline' environment. People who express their true self online consider their online relationships to be very important. Not all Internet users will be empowered through online communication; it is a positive experience primarily for socially anxious and lonely individuals who find it difficult to express themselves in face-to-face situations (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002).

In the context of positive aspects of online relation, hyperpersonal theory should also be mentioned (Walther, Slovacek, Tidwell, 2001). This theory explains why in online communication people often develop closer relationships more quickly than in face-to-face contact. People in their online self-presentation can be quite strategic. Online communication usually provides certain time for sending answers, even within only a few moments. That time is valuable for thinking what one really should or wants to communicate. When people have time to decide what to say or when to communicate at all, they unintentionally create a false image of themselves – present themselves in the most positive light. This 'tuned' communication leads to faster creation of intimate and close relationships. However, this is also a big trap because the partner's idealization is developing, which in the later phases of the relationship can lead to disappointment and termination of the contact. In the study of online romantic relationships on a sample of adolescents from Serbia (Opsenica Kostić & Panić, 2017), as positive aspects of relationships, adolescents recognized the effect of disinhibition and the presentation of a true self, but designated elements of hyperpersonal theory as negative aspects of relationships.

In the above-mentioned review study by Best, Manktelow, and Taylor (2014), as one of the benefits, positive experimenting with one's own identity was singled out. This is also one of the positive aspects for theoreticians. Patricia Wallace wrote in 1999 about "identity experiments in internet laboratory" (Wallace, 1999). She

believes that even when people in their online presentation change fundamental characteristics like age, race, or gender, they do not simply make it in order to be liars or con artists. "We are playing with our own identities and trying different hats to see how they feel and how others will react to them" (Wallace, 1999, p. 47). She believes that experimenting with identities is an important part of development; also, identity crises that are experienced, especially by young people, are valuable for personal growth. Whitty (2008) describes a similar phenomenon as positive and calls it 'playing in cyberspace'. She suggests that cyberspace can also feel like a more fun, creative, and therapeutic space compared to the offline world. Playing with identities and trying different roles online can be empowering experience for individuals, especially those who have been unsuccessful in offline relationships (Whitty, 2008).

DANGERS OF ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING

Previous research has revealed a variety of negative consequences of SMT when it comes to wellbeing (Best, Manktelow & Taylor, 2014). These studies have adopted a theoretical model that sees online communication as being insufficient and that results in increased risk of depression and/or social isolation. Correlations between preferences for social interaction, making friends online, and decrease in wellbeing were found; but, little, if any, association was found between the number of online friends and lower wellbeing. There is even a study which suggests that a mere possession of an online profile may decrease mental wellbeing; yet, this negative link was found only for young females at the earliest adolescent age – 10 to 11-year olds (Devine & Lloyd, 2012). One of the most important findings is that there is a relation between increased use, namely time spent online, and increased risk of exposure to online harm, especially related to cyberbullying. Since it is known that cyberbullying is associated with increased depression, this is really a risk to adolescent wellbeing. However, research does not find a significant correlation between the time spent online and negative wellbeing. The amount of time itself does not have to mean much; we should examine the effects of different and specific online activities (Best, Manktelow & Taylor, 2014).

CYBERBULLYING AND POSSIBLE WAYS OF PREVENTION

One of the greatest risks of social networking and the Internet use is cyberbullying (or online bullying). This phenomenon is defined as "repeated, aggressive, and deliberate action performed by an individual or a group by means of electronic communication methods, directed to victims who cannot easily defend themselves" (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). There are a number of negative consequences associated with traditional bullying, for which it is justified to believe that exist in the context of electronic bullying: indifference and not attending school, suicidal ideas, eating disorders, depression (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008b). Later research has confirmed this. Victimization is linked to lower self-esteem and self-efficacy and it also results in anxiety, higher stress, depressive symptoms, and locus of control (Fredstorm, Adams, & Gilman, 2011). In the Brown, Demaray, and Secord study (2014) it was found that the relations between cyber victimization and social emotional outcomes differed by gender such that for girls, cyber victimization was related to internalizing problems, depression, and social stress while relations were not found for boys. Time spent on the Internet has been an important predictor of inclusion in cyberbullying in the research among our population (for example, Opsenica Kostić, Panić, & Cakić, 2015; Popadić & Kuzmanović, 2016). What is encouraging is the fact that parental mediation can act preventively in the domain of cyberbullying. In their study of parental mediation and children's Internet use, Livingstone and Helsper (2008) recognized four factors: active co-use, technical restrictions, interactions restrictions, and monitoring. While the first three strategies are related to what has already been known from the studies of television viewing, monitoring is a new strategy that implies surveilling online activities. It is also very important that such activities affect not only the use of media, but also wider emotional and behavioral outcomes in children (Vaala & Bleakley, 2015). The research on a sample of adolescents from Serbia has also confirmed the preventive nature of parental mediation (Opsenica Kostić, Panić, & Pedović, 2016). There is another way to prevent cyberbullying, and it is connected to knowing the roles in the situation of bullying. Apart from bully, victims and bully-victims, bystanders are involved in bullying indirectly. Observers play their role in bully-

ing, as expressed in Goffman's dramaturgical metaphors, not at the front-stage, but at the back-stage (Goffman, 1959, as cited in Burns, Maycock, Cross, & Brown, 2008). Since the performance of one, any role, can be changed by the performance of another, the basic idea of many programs to prevent traditional and online bullying is to activate the observer in the direction of a clear disapproval of violence (Burns, Maycock, Cross, & Brown, 2008; Opsenica Kostic, Panic & Cakic, 2015; Van Ouytsel, Walrave, & Vandebosch, 2014). Also, researchers recommend that health care professionals should regularly include screening questions about children's online activities in the general pediatric visit, including questions about video games and cyberbullying (Aboujaoude, Savage, Starcevic & Salame, 2015).

ABOUT SOME STUDIES AIMED AT USING THE INTERNET IN GENERAL

A detailed survey of research on risk and digital violence on a large stratified sample of students from Serbia, can be found in Popadić and Kuzmanović (2016). The survey was conducted at the end of 2012. It should be said immediately that the authors were not focused on identifying benefits from the use of ICT, so there is no data on it. Student activities on the Internet are classified into three basic groups: communication, entertainment, and information retrieval. The results show that students most often use the Internet for communication purposes, i.e. to visit social networks (daily or almost daily 69% of senior primary school students and 81% of high school students), then to watch videos, series, and films (daily or almost every day 50% of senior primary school students and 62% of high school students) and surf the Internet (daily or almost every day 35% of the senior primary school students and 49% of high school students). The largest number of adolescents from the sample (62% of senior primary school students and 84% of high school students) at least once in the past year exposed themselves to a risk. Risks are really serious, because they are mostly about sharing personal data, communication, and even encounters with strangers (6% of primary school students and 15% of high school students accepted a meeting with a person they met online). Such information may also indicate the curiosity of adolescents,

but also loneliness—there are studies that show that participants who reported feeling lonely or socially anxious in school on a daily basis, were more likely to communicate with people they did not know well (Gross, Juvonen & Gable, 2002). Inclusion in cyberbullying was reported by about one-third of younger and even two-thirds of older adolescents. A significant number of students also found themselves in the role of witnesses of digital violence. Pupils obviously need support in terms of how to respond to violence: some show compassion for others and try to help (teach victims how to provide technical protection, advise them to report violence to parents, provide them with support and understanding), others are passive observers (they do not want or they do not know how to help), and the third oppose the attackers and protect the victim in an unconstructive manner (threats, force, etc.) (Popadić & Kuzmanović, 2016). Education is also needed to parents, as children consider that parents have less computer skills than themselves and do not perceive them as partners in digital communication. About half of the parents in this study did not attempt to, in any way, direct or restrict the use of the Internet to their children; the disturbance of children by others was related to the supervision of parents, but this relationship is weak (Popadić & Kuzmanović, 2016). The authors advocate the availability and visibility of information on the positive and negative aspects of using the Internet, the potential risks and ways of safe use of digital media to all students (through compulsory curriculum), teachers and other school employees, but also to parents (Popadić & Kuzmanović, 2016).

Another very interesting study that we will mention here was also carried out on a large representative stratified sample (Bezinović, Roviš, Rončević & Bilajac, 2015). The sample included high school students from Istria County, Croatia (N = 1539, mean age 16.26), and the relationship between forms of the Internet use and mental health of adolescents was examined. It used the instruments that include both problematic and positive areas of psychological functioning related to mental health and quality of life. Six problematic areas were measured by nine short subscales: health-related complaints, symptoms of depression, social anxiety, aggressive behavior, substance use, feelings of loneliness; "positive" or preventive areas of psychological functioning were measured by three subscales: friendship, conscientiousness, and life satisfaction. The authors used canonical correlation analysis to

test the associations between sets of the Internet use factors and self-rated mental health variables. Three significant canonical functions were obtained. The first describes the syndrome of problematic behavior. This form of the Internet use was associated with aggressive behavior and substance misuse. These types of behavior were perceived more in males than in females. It accounted for a significant percentage of 38.0% of the variance (Bezinović, Roviš, Rončević & Bilajac, 2015). The second canonical function describes experiences of victimization, harassment, or threats on the Internet. This function was related to the pronounced symptoms of depression, health problems, feelings of loneliness, and social anxiety. Such feelings were seen more in girls than in boys. The second function accounted for a significant percentage of 13.8% of the variance. The third canonical function described the shared variance of internet use for recreational and for academic purposes. It was associated with friendship, which was taken as a measure of positive social relationships. This function accounted for only 6.1% of the variance (Bezinović, Roviš, Rončević & Bilajac, 2015). The authors state that, although the last couple of factors "accounted for a lesser proportion of the variance, these two canonical functions describe the potentially interesting patterns of association between internet use and mental health. Namely, these findings suggest that communication technologies may have some positive effects because they enable faster and easier communication, networking, friendship-making, and completion of school tasks" (Bezinović, Roviš, Rončević & Bilajac, 2015, p.303). Such use of the Internet fulfills the needs of adolescents concerning their general social development and may be especially useful for those who do not make friends offline easily. The authors' conclusion that the Internet use can have both positive and adverse effects on the mental health of youth is considered very important. While we should not neglect the negative effects that ICT can have on wellbeing of adolescents, we believe that more research and promotion of the benefits of these technologies should be pursued.

USE OF THE INTERNET FOR THE PURPOSE OF IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH

In the last decades, numerous studies have been conducted indicating that social support plays a vital role in everyday life and contributes to both mental and physical health of people. At the beginning of this paper, when relating to the benefits of social networking, it was noted that perceptions of online community integration and social support could lead to increased wellbeing. The support provided in this way is significant, but it is both casual and informal. On the other hand, today there are many online support groups or communities whose primary purpose is to support a group of people with a common problem or life challenge. The most common form in which people meet each other online to exchange support is through so-called bulletin boards or discussion forums (Tanis, 2007). In these forums members can contribute by posting messages that others can read, and if desired, respond to. Active participation is not required and people can visit the forum without contributing to the dissolution (on some forums newcomers are even advised not to contribute right away, and first get acquainted with the mode of conduct of the group). Web-forums are generally not under the supervision of healthcare professionals and are accessible to all visitors, after registration (Tanis, 2007). How can such forums improve the mental health of adolescents (and people in general)?

Computer mediated communication gives communicators the opportunity to remain anonymous if they wish to do so. Perception of anonymity can have some consequences for the way people express themselves, which is probably the most important part of the explanation why online groups are characterized by high levels of self-disclosure (Wallace, 1999; Wright, 2000; Joinson 2001). Walter's term of hyperpersonal interaction (Walther, 1996; Walther, Slovacek, Tidwell, 2001) should also be kept in mind, which is briefly explained in the context of positive aspects of online relating. People in the online environment have the opportunity for selective self-presentation and can present themselves in a friendlier, more knowledgeable, emphatic way. In these circumstances, a person can deal with topics that he/she hesitates to talk about, whether he/she seeks help or is trying to help others. Online support groups are mainly text-based, which has more advantages

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for users. Studies of Pennebaker and colleagues (Pennebaker, 1997; Pennebaker, Mayne, & Francis, 1997) suggest that the act of writing down feelings or experiences can be therapeutic in itself, because it causes cognitive changes. When disclosing personal feelings or traumatic experiences to others, individuals need to develop an understandable narrative on the subject. By doing so, they have to formulate a coherent and insightful explanation of the situation and their feelings, which provides them with more understanding of the situation they are in. Another advantage of text-based interactions is that people have the opportunity to carefully compose their messages. This gives people a chance to reflect on the messages before posting them, which can be especially valuable when the topic of discussion is a highly sensitive or emotional issue. As a consequence, the quality of interactions in online support groups might be higher than in their offline equivalents (Tanis, 2007). The next significant advantage of text-based persona is that people are valued for their contribution instead of their physical appearance (Weinberg, Schmale, Uken, & Wessel, 1995). This can be liberating, particularly for people who face prejudices based on age, sex, ethnicity, material status, and similar characteristics that are easily visible in face-to-face communication. Text-based online interaction enables them to participate in the same way as other members. With these advantages, online support groups offer possibilities to expand social networks and find a community of perceived similar others. To be among others who face similar situation, or at least have an understanding of what someone is going through, can provide a sense of community and safety, so that a person feels less lonely and unique (King & Moreggi, 1998, as cited in Tanis , 2007).

Online mental health promotion and prevention interventions for adolescents can be organized by a school or other institution the work of which is focused on wellbeing of young people. Clarke, Kuosmanen and Barry (2015) in their paper give an overview of the effectiveness of such programs that were conducted for youth aged 12–25 years. There are not many papers in this field. The authors analyzed eight studies evaluating six mental health promotion interventions and 20 studies evaluating 15 prevention interventions (studies were published in the period of 2000–2013). It is interesting to see what the programs were doing. Among other things, there are Internet-based stress management courses for the young, which were aimed at developing knowledge about stress and effective coping strategies, increasing the use of effective

coping strategies and improving mental wellbeing of adolescents. Several programs were focused on the Internet-based relationship education, which offered skill training for effective communication and problem-solving techniques, and there were also programs aimed at improving the awareness and attitudes of youth towards mental health issues. It can be noted that cognitive-behavioral therapists were interested in online interventions, as there have been reports of several CBT programs related to symptoms of depression (according to Clarke, Kuosmanen & Barry, 2015). The authors conclude that there is a tentative evidence that skill-based interventions (within mental health promotion interventions) presented in a module-based format can have positive effects on mental health of adolescents. However, the conclusion is drawn on a relatively small number of studies. The online prevention interventions produced promising results concerning computerized cognitive behavioral therapy interventions and the way they affect symptoms of anxiety and depression in adolescents and emerging adults (Clarke, Kuosmanen & Barry, 2015)

CONCLUSIONS The use of ICT is common today, and particularly important for adolescents who do not know how to communicate and access information prior to the Internet. Given that the Internet provides a very wide range of content and activities, it is not easy to distinguish between what is potentially positive and what is negative for adolescents. Based on the findings of previous research, it can be concluded that social networking, primarily through self-disclosing and social support, can improve wellbeing of adolescents. On the other hand, online communication and social networks also serve to a great danger of the use of ICT – cyberbullying. This type of harassment, which often remains hidden from parents and teachers, is associated with a number of negative outcomes in the development of adolescents. Therefore, cyberbullying prevention should be given special attention. It is possible to (consciously) use the Internet for the purpose of improving mental health and the most accessible way is online support groups, which help a person to overcome his/her problems. It is possible to implement the structured online mental health promotion and prevention programs, focused on various problems. Organizing such activities for students requires additional efforts, but it would be advisable to talk and learn about online communication in the online environment itself. Although it contains potential negative aspects, based

on research data it can be conducted that Internet use can significantly contribute to and promote mental health of adolescents. Precondition exists, that is the awareness of the dangers and advantages of cyberspace.

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Резиме   Интернет и ментално здравље адолесцената

Данашње генерације адолесцената одрасле су уз информационо-комуникационе технологије, које имају значајно место у њиховим животима. Специфичности младих људи, који се у многим областима живота значајно ослањају на ИЦТ, у економски развијеним земљама уочене су на прелазу из 19-ог у 20-ти век. Једно од важних питања у овом контексту јесте однос интернета и менталног здравља адолесцената. Прва тема којом се бави овај рад јесте однос употребе интернета и менталног здравља, а друга тема су могућности које интернет пружа за унапређење благостања адолесцената. Најчешћа активност младих на интернету, како у свету, тако и у Србији, јесте друштвено умрежавање. Онлајн друштвене мреже могу имати позитиван ефекат

на благостање. Тај ефекат је индиректан и повезан са перципираном социјалном подршком: активност на друштвеним мрежама даје могућности за лакше емоционално отварање, које може да води ка позитивним реакцијама других, што даље води ка порасту самопоштовања и осећаја припадања, а крајњи резултат је израженији осећај субјективног благостања. Кроз ову слику, коју дају налази емпиријских истраживања, потврду добијају теорије које наглашавају позитивне аспекте онлајн повезивања: теорија ефекта дезинхибиције, испољавања истинског селфа, хиперперсоналних интеракција и експериментисања са идентитетом. Међутим, друштвене мреже (и онлајн комуникација уопште) могу имати и значајне негативне ефекте на ментално здравље адолесцената, уколико су они изложени електронском малтретирању. Електронско малтретирање је понављани, агресивни и намерни чин који изводи појединца или група, усмерен на жртву која не може лако да се одбрани. Неке од значајних могућих последица кибермалтретирања су депресивност, анксиозност, изостајање из школе и суицидалне идеје. Резултати истраживања електронског малтретирања указују и на путеве могуће превенције, а то је родитељска укљученост у онлајн активности деце, активирање посматрача тј. сведока малтретирања у смеру спречавања, осуђивања и пријављивања онлајн агресије, укључивање питања о онлајн активностима у прегледе/разговоре који се обављају са адолесцентима, као и спровођење програма едукације у онлајн комуникацији. Друга тема овог рада је планирана употреба интернета у сврхе побољшања менталног здравља. Младима (као и припадницима осталих узрасних група) данас су најдоступније онлајн групе за подршку, које имају за циљ повезивање и узајамну помоћ људи са сличним проблемом или животним изазовом. Најчешћа форма група за подршку су форуми, који, опет најчешће, нису под супервизијом стручњака из области менталног здравља. Форуми су углавном базирани на текстуалној комуникацији, која има низ потенцијалних предности за кориснике. Могуће је и организовање онлајн промоција и превенција у области менталног здравља, на којима су ангажовани експерти из ове области. Истраживања показују да онлајн интервенције везане за развој вештина (нпр. комуникационих или везаних за превладавање стреса) могу имати позитиван ефекат на ментално здравље адолесцената. Резултати евалуација онлајн програма дају врло охрабрујуће резултате примене когни-

тивно-бихевиоралне терапије онлајн и њених ефеката на симптоме анксиозности и депресивности код адолесцената. Иако садржи потенцијално негативне аспекте, на основу налаза истраживања може се закључити да употреба интернета може у значајној мери да допринесе очувању и унапређењу менталног здравља адолесцената. Предуслов таквом доприносу је едукација о опасностима и предностима киберпростора.

Кључне речи: нет генерација, ментално здравље, друштвене мреже, електронско малтретирање, онлајн групе за подршку.

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