

HABITS AND BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS OF STUDENTS IN RELATION TO THE SIX COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL NETWORK SITES ADDICTION

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DOI: 10.5937/BatutPHCO24054J

Background: Young adults are especially drawn to social media because at this age of life, when social needs are at their peak, it allows them to connect with others and express themselves in ways that weren't possible before. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this need was even more pronounced. We describe the use of social networks as excessive when there is immoderate, obsessive use, followed by preoccupation and a sense of loss of control, which leads to various negative consequences. Addiction to social networks is an extreme form of its excessive use.

Objectives and Methods: The goal of our research was to determine which habits and patterns of behavior, before and during COVID-19, represent risk factors for excessive use of social networks among students of the Faculty of Medicine in Niš. The study included 357 randomly selected students. It was conducted through a Google forms electronic questionnaire. Symptoms of excessive use of social networks were measured with the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale - BSMAS. The socioeconomic characteristics and patterns of behavior were also assessed as a part of the survey.

Results: All 6 specific components of addiction were positively and most strongly associated with time spent on social networks. Slightly weaker correlations were found for the components Tolerance, Mood Change and Withdrawal Symptoms in favor of male students. The number of active accounts showed a significant association with the Tolerance component, as well as with Withdrawal Symptoms and Conflict, while the number of active devices was only associated with Relapse and Tolerance. It was found that the Tolerance component is positively correlated with the length of night's sleep. Except for Relapse, "Adequately provided compensation for content denied to students during the pandemic" correlated positively with all other five addiction components. "Home isolation" for the duration of the pandemic, however, negatively correlated with all examined addiction components, except for Prominence and Tolerance.

Conclusion: The higher prevalence of social media addiction among younger age groups can be attributed to their higher level of digital literacy and competence. A statistically significant increase in the number of active accounts, time spent on social networks, but also a decrease in the number of active devices during the COVID-19 pandemic was determined.

Keywords: COVID-19, behaviour, students