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SUBJECTIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND EXCESSIVE INTERNET USE AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN A SCHOOL-BASED CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

Markéta Šimková,

PhDr. Ing. mgr. Ed. D., LL.M.

DTI University

ul. Sládkovičova 533/20

018 41 Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5538-3809>

Jakub Šimek MSc.,

mgr. University of Social Sciences and Security in Prague, Foreign Branch

Czech Republic

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4245-1692>

jakvb.simek@icloud.com

Summary. The present study examines the relationship between the structure of adolescents' leisure activities, the extent of excessive internet use, and subjectively perceived psychological distress. The research is grounded in the assumption that adolescents' digital behaviour cannot be reduced solely to time spent online but must be understood within the broader psychosocial context of their everyday lives. The study was designed as a quantitative cross-sectional survey conducted in a school setting. The research sample comprised 397 adolescents attending different types of secondary school in the Ústí nad Labem Region. Excessive internet use was measured using the Excessive Internet Use Scale (EIU), which is based on Griffiths' biopsychosocial model of behavioural addictions. Psychological well-being was assessed through a single self-report item addressing predominant mood; this deliberately narrow conceptualisation limits the scope for clinically relevant interpretation. The data were analysed using descriptive statistical procedures and the chi-square test. No statistically significant relationship was found between excessive internet use and sex, school type, parental control, or a preference for spending leisure time alone rather than with peers. By contrast, a statistically significant association emerged between excessive internet use and subjectively perceived psychological distress, with an effect size of Cramér's $V = 0.226$, corresponding to a weak-to-moderate effect. These findings support the conceptualisation of excessive internet use as a continuous phenomenon and highlight the importance of adolescents' subjective experience when interpreting digital behaviour. The study also suggests that preventive and supportive approaches should focus less on merely controlling adolescents' digital behaviour and more on understanding the function of online activities in their lives.

Keywords: adolescence, leisure time, excessive internet use, psychological distress, digital behaviour.

Introduction

Adolescence is a developmental period characterised by complex biological, cognitive, emotional, and psychosocial changes that fundamentally shape identity formation, behavioural regulation, and the quality of social relationships. Leisure occupies a prominent place during this period, as it is not merely the time remaining after school and family obligations have been met but also a key setting for socialisation, self-realisation, experimentation with roles, and the formation of relational bonds. The structure and quality of leisure activities therefore have a substantial bearing on adolescents' psychosocial functioning and on their adaptive and risk-related patterns of behaviour. This premise draws on earlier research into the leisure patterns of Czech youth (Sak, 2000; Kraus, 2008), whose central propositions are also supported by more recent scholarship that understands the digitalisation of leisure as a qualitative, rather than merely quantitative, transformation of adolescents' socialisation environment (Šmahel, 2016).

Contemporary adolescence, however, unfolds amid the pronounced digitalisation of everyday life, as online environments permeate communication, entertainment, education, self-presentation, and the formation of self-concept. Digital technologies have become an integral part of adolescents' daily lives and have fundamentally reshaped traditional patterns of leisure. The issue is not simply an increase in time spent online but, more importantly, a qualitative shift in the organisation of everyday experience, the dynamics of social interaction, and the ways in which adolescents interpret social reality. The digital

environment should therefore be understood as a specific psychosocial context for contemporary adolescent development (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011; Šmahel, 2016). In this sense, digital technologies may be understood not merely as technical tools, but as components of a broader educational, therapeutic, and psychosocial environment whose significance is shaped by their function, the relationships in which they are embedded, and the context of their use (Šimek, 2026c).

As the digital environment has gained importance, scholarly discourse has placed increasing emphasis on excessive and problematic internet use. The present text deliberately distinguishes between concepts whose relationship is not consistently defined in the literature. Excessive internet use refers to online activity that is more intensive in both quantitative and qualitative terms and that, although it may not yet meet the criteria for addiction, already affects an individual's everyday functioning. Problematic internet use places greater emphasis on functional impairment and motivational dimensions, whereas the term *netolism* is used in some Czech academic literature (cf. Šmahel, 2016) as an umbrella designation for addictive and risky forms of online behaviour, despite having no standardised equivalent in international nomenclature. Traditional approaches that reduce digital behaviour primarily to quantitative indicators, particularly the amount of time spent online, have proved insufficient because they overlook the motivational, functional, and psychosocial dimensions of use. Excessive internet use should therefore not be understood as a homogeneous phenomenon but as a continuum extending from ordinary and adaptive use to forms that may disrupt an individual's daily functioning. Although Young's pioneering work (1998) was the first to articulate this continuum, critical reviews have noted that directly applying substance-addiction criteria to online behaviour creates methodological problems and risks overpathologising ordinary everyday conduct (Billieux et al., 2015). Contemporary frameworks, including the I-PACE model proposed by Brand et al. (2019), therefore extend Young's approach by incorporating neuropsychological and affective processes and conceptualise problematic internet use as the product of interactions among personality-related, cognitive, and executive factors (Young, 1998; Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Billieux et al., 2015; Brand et al., 2019; Soriano-Molina et al., 2025).

The developmental characteristics of adolescence also heighten young people's sensitivity to particular features of the digital environment. Greater emotional reactivity, the importance of peer feedback, and the ongoing formation of identity give online settings particular psychological relevance for adolescents. Social networking platforms provide immediate feedback while also creating opportunities for social comparison, with substantial implications for both self-concept and psychological well-being (Valkenburg et al., 2006; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). The psychological significance of social media lies not only in the duration of exposure, but also in their capacity to intensify social comparison, emotional vulnerability, pressure surrounding self-presentation, and the risk of internalising negative feedback (Šimek, 2026a). Digital shaming is also particularly significant in this context, as it may affect adolescents' sense of school belonging, their relationships with peers, their willingness to seek help, and their overall sense of safety in both school and online environments (Šimek & Vochozka, 2026).

Research to date has produced mixed conclusions regarding the relationship between internet use and adolescent mental health. Some studies point to associations between excessive internet use and higher levels of anxiety, depressive affect, or loneliness, whereas other findings emphasise the importance of contextual factors, including the quality of offline relationships, the purpose of use, and individual characteristics. Meta-analytic reviews (Soriano-Molina et al., 2025; Chen & Fan, 2024) suggest that the relationship between excessive internet use and adolescents' psychological distress is bidirectional and moderated by contextual variables, as distress may both precede risky online behaviour and arise from it. A simple linear relationship between digital behaviour and psychological well-being should therefore not be assumed; rather, the evidence indicates a complex network of mutually conditioned associations (Odgers & Jensen, 2020; Kardefelt-Winther, 2014).

The structure of adolescents' leisure activities represents an important, though comparatively less emphasised, area of inquiry. Leisure may be understood as a psychosocial space in which behavioural patterns, forms of emotion regulation, and coping strategies are developed. The transformation of leisure through digitalisation may therefore constitute an important factor influencing both the extent of excessive internet use and its associations with psychological well-being (Kraus, 2008; Šmahel, 2016).

The family environment and parental mediation of digital behaviour also warrant particular attention. Simple assumptions that greater control automatically leads to lower levels of risky internet use have proved inadequate. More consequential factors may include relationship quality, patterns of communication, and the capacity to reflect on the function of digital activities in adolescents' lives (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). Parental control should therefore be distinguished from relationally grounded parental presence, since, in some family contexts, digital technologies may also function as a substitute means of regulating the child or as compensation for weakened everyday family communication (Šimek, 2026b).

The present study analyses the relationships between the structure of adolescents' leisure activities, the extent of excessive internet use, and subjectively perceived psychological distress. Selected demographic and contextual variables are also considered, particularly sex, school type, parental control, and the social context in which leisure time is spent. Rather than reducing digital behaviour to the sheer extent of online activity, the study seeks to understand its associations within the broader psychosocial context of adolescents' everyday lives. This objective gives rise to the following research questions and corresponding hypotheses: whether the extent of excessive internet use differs by sex (H1), by the type of school attended (H2), by how leisure time is spent, particularly whether adolescents spend it mainly alone or with peers (H3), and by the degree of parental control over digital behaviour (H4), and, finally, whether a statistically significant relationship exists between excessive internet use and subjectively perceived psychological well-being (H5). All hypotheses derive from the theoretical framework outlined above, and their rationale rests on empirical evidence concerning the developmental specificities of adolescence, the roles of peer relationships and the family environment in online behaviour, and the association between psychological well-being and risky digital behaviour.

Methodology

The study was designed as a quantitative cross-sectional survey examining relationships between the structure of adolescents' leisure activities, indicators of excessive internet use, and subjectively perceived psychological distress. The research design followed a non-experimental approach that made it possible to capture associations among the variables under investigation within the natural environment of a school population.

The research sample comprised adolescents attending selected types of secondary school in the Ústí nad Labem Region. A total of 397 respondents participated, including 167 girls and 230 boys. The sample covered adolescents aged 14 to 19 and included lower-secondary pupils, students at secondary vocational schools, and grammar-school students. Schools were selected on the basis of accessibility and willingness to participate, and the survey encompassed institutions from different parts of the Ústí nad Labem Region, including both larger cities and medium-sized municipalities. Respondents' socioeconomic characteristics were not assessed systematically, which limits the interpretation of the findings. Convenience sampling was used, as is common in school-based studies of this type, although it also restricts the extent to which the results can be generalised to the wider population.

Data were collected through an anonymous questionnaire administered in the school setting. The instrument contained several thematic sections addressing the structure of leisure activities, patterns of time spent online, selected demographic and contextual characteristics, and subjectively perceived psychological well-being.

The extent of excessive internet use was assessed using the Excessive Internet Use Scale (EIU), which draws on Griffiths' biopsychosocial model of behavioural addictions and comprises six components: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, and relapse (Griffiths, 2005). For the purposes of dichotomisation in hypothesis testing, the level of netolism was divided into lower and higher categories using a cut-off point of 1.0. This value was not derived from validation data for the EIU scale but from the distribution of results in the present sample, in which no respondent reached the clinically relevant cut-off of 2.6. The selected threshold therefore served exclusively as an analytical device for distinguishing relatively lower from relatively higher levels of the symptoms observed within the sample and cannot be interpreted as a clinically meaningful threshold. Dichotomising continuous data generally reduces the statistical sensitivity of analyses, and alternative approaches using

continuous values might have produced different results. Values between 0.00 and 1.00 were interpreted as indicating a lower level of netolism. Although no respondent reached the cut-off value of 2.6, which would indicate a substantially developed risk of netolism, the distribution of results revealed varying intensities of excessive internet use within the sample. The differing numbers of respondents included in the analyses of hypotheses H2 ($n = 179$), H3 ($n = 301$), and H5 ($n = 330$), compared with the total sample ($N = 397$), reflect the fact that H2 and H3 compare only specific subgroups rather than the full sample, whereas 67 respondents with neutral or ambiguous mood ratings were excluded from the H5 analysis to preserve the dichotomous classification into predominantly good and predominantly bad mood.

Subjectively perceived psychological well-being was assessed using a single self-report item addressing predominant mood, with well-being operationalised analytically as either predominantly good or predominantly bad mood. This approach deliberately does not capture the multidimensional nature of psychological well-being as a construct, for which validated standardised instruments such as the WEMWBS, GHQ-12, and PHQ-4 are available. The findings therefore cannot be interpreted as evidence of psychological well-being in a clinically or psychologically meaningful sense, but only as an indicative measure of subjective emotional experience at the time of the survey. Parental control was operationalised through a single dichotomous item concerning parental interest in the adolescent's engagement in the online world. This simplification does not capture the dimensions of active, restrictive, or technical mediation as elaborated in the literature (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). Findings concerning parental control must therefore be read as reflecting only one partial dimension of this complex construct.

The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and the chi-square test, which was employed to examine relationships between categorical variables. The analysis addressed five hypotheses concerning sex, field of study, the manner in which leisure time was spent, parental control, and subjectively perceived psychological well-being.

Results

The descriptive analysis showed that the largest proportion of respondents fell within the interval from 1.01 to 1.50, comprising 133 individuals, or 34% of the sample. The second-largest group consisted of 125 respondents, or 31%, whose scores ranged from 0.51 to 1.00. A further 74 respondents, representing 19%, scored between 1.51 and 2.00, while 21 respondents, or 5% of the sample, fell within the interval from 2.01 to 2.50. The lowest interval, from 0.00 to 0.50, comprised 44 respondents, or 11%. The mean EIU score for the entire sample was $M = 1.13$ ($SD = 0.52$); these values were reconstructed from the grouped frequency distribution using interval midpoints because the raw data were unavailable. The minimum was 0.00 and the maximum 2.50. No respondent reached the clinically relevant cut-off of 2.6. The distribution therefore confirms variability in the extent of excessive internet use within the sample, although no fully developed high-risk category was present. In demographic terms, the sample comprised 167 girls and 230 boys and included basic-school pupils, secondary vocational school students, and grammar-school students attending schools in the Ústí nad Labem Region.

No statistically significant association was found between sex and the level of netolism. The analysis included 167 girls and 230 boys. Among the girls, 80 respondents were classified as having a lower level of netolism and 87 as having a higher level. Among the boys, 88 were placed in the lower-level category and 142 in the higher-level category. The test statistic was $\chi^2 = 3.686$ with 1 degree of freedom, which did not exceed the critical value of 3.841 at the 0.05 significance level. The effect size expressed as Cramér's V was 0.096, corresponding to a negligible effect. The result therefore did not permit rejection of the null hypothesis and provided no evidence of a statistically significant difference between boys and girls in the level of netolism risk.

No statistically significant relationship with the level of netolism was found for field of study either. The analysis included 101 students from secondary vocational schools and 78 grammar-school students; the remaining respondents, who attended other types of school, were not included in this partial analysis. Among students in vocational programmes, 32 were classified as having a lower level of netolism and 69 as having a higher level. Among grammar-school students, 31 fell into the lower-level category and 47 into the higher-level category. The test statistic was $\chi^2 = 1.255$ with 1 degree of freedom, which did

not exceed the critical value of 3.841. The effect size expressed as Cramér's V was 0.084, indicating a negligible effect. The null hypothesis could therefore not be rejected in this case either, and the difference between students in vocational programmes and grammar-school students was not statistically significant.

No statistically significant relationship was found between the manner in which leisure time was spent and the level of netolism. The analysis included 92 adolescents who reported spending their leisure time mainly alone and 209 who reported spending it predominantly with peers. Respondents who spent most of their leisure time with parents or with a girlfriend or boyfriend were excluded from this partial analysis. Among adolescents who spent leisure time mainly alone, 38 were classified as having a lower level of netolism and 54 as having a higher level. In the group spending leisure time predominantly with peers, 100 respondents fell into the lower-level category and 109 into the higher-level category. The test statistic was $\chi^2 = 1.102$ with 1 degree of freedom, which again did not exceed the critical value of 3.841. The effect size expressed as Cramér's V was 0.060, corresponding to a negligible effect. The null hypothesis could therefore not be rejected.

Similarly, no statistically significant relationship was established between the degree of parental control and the level of netolism. Greater parental control or interest in the adolescent's participation in the online world was reported by 267 respondents, whereas 130 indicated lower parental interest. Among adolescents with lower parental control, 47 were classified as having a lower level of netolism and 83 as having a higher level. In the group with greater parental control, 120 respondents fell into the lower-level category and 147 into the higher-level category. The test statistic was $\chi^2 = 2.775$ with 1 degree of freedom, again below the critical value of 3.841. The effect size expressed as Cramér's V was 0.084, indicating a negligible effect. No statistically significant relationship between parental control and the level of netolism was demonstrated.

The only statistically significant finding concerned the relationship between subjectively perceived psychological well-being and the level of netolism. This analysis included 330 respondents, of whom 221 reported predominantly good mood and 109 predominantly bad mood. The remaining 67 selected a neutral or ambiguous response and were excluded from the dichotomous analysis. Among adolescents reporting predominantly good mood, 122 were classified as having a lower level of netolism and 99 as having a higher level. Among those reporting predominantly bad mood, 34 fell into the lower-level category and 75 into the higher-level category. The test statistic was $\chi^2 = 16.889$ with 1 degree of freedom, markedly exceeding the critical value of 3.841 at the 0.05 significance level. The effect size expressed as Cramér's V was 0.226, corresponding to a weak-to-moderate effect and indicating a practically relevant rather than merely statistically significant relationship. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, and a statistically significant relationship between subjectively perceived psychological well-being and the level of netolism was established. It should nevertheless be emphasised that psychological well-being was assessed using a single dichotomous self-report item whose psychometric properties had not been verified; the result must consequently be interpreted with appropriate caution.

In summary, the sample showed no statistically significant relationship between the level of netolism and sex, field of study, the manner in which leisure time was spent, or the degree of parental control. A statistically significant relationship was confirmed only between the level of netolism and subjectively perceived psychological distress.

An overview of the results for each hypothesis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Overview of results for each hypothesis

Hypothesis	Groups compared	N	χ^2	df	Result
H1	girls $\times$ boys	397	3.686	1	not supported ($V = 0.096$)
H2	secondary vocational school students $\times$ grammar-school students	179	1.255	1	not supported ($V = 0.084$)
H3	predominantly alone $\times$ predominantly with peers	301	1.102	1	not supported ($V = 0.060$)
H4	lower parental control $\times$ higher parental control	397	2.775	1	not supported ($V = 0.084$)
H5	predominantly good mood $\times$ predominantly bad mood	330	16.889	1	supported ($V = 0.226$)

Source: Own work.

Interpretation of the aggregate hypothesis-testing results shows that, of the five hypotheses formulated, only H5, which concerned the relationship between subjectively perceived psychological well-being and the level of netolism, received statistical support. The test statistic of $\chi^2 = 16.889$ with one degree of freedom exceeded the critical value at the 0.05 significance level, allowing the null hypothesis to be rejected and confirming a statistically significant relationship between the variables under investigation.

Statistical significance was not demonstrated for H1, H2, H3, or H4 because the calculated test statistics did not reach the critical χ^2 value for the specified significance level. Accordingly, the results provided no evidence of statistically significant differences associated with sex, school type, the manner in which leisure time was spent, or the degree of parental control in relation to the level of netolism.

Overall, subjectively perceived psychological well-being was the only factor to emerge as statistically significant in the sample, whereas none of the other variables examined proved significant in relation to the level of netolism.

Discussion

The study sought to analyse the relationships between the structure of adolescents' leisure activities, the extent of excessive internet use, and subjectively perceived psychological distress within a school-based sample. The findings yield several substantive insights that can be situated within the broader context of contemporary research on adolescents' digital behaviour.

The results showed that no manifestations consistent with a fully developed form of problematic internet use were identified in the sample, although variability was observed in the intensity of excessive use. This finding supports the conceptualisation of excessive internet use as a continuous phenomenon rather than a clearly delimited pathological category, which is also consistent with contemporary critical approaches to rigid definitions of internet addiction (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014).

The absence of a statistically significant relationship between sex and excessive internet use suggests that the digital environment is becoming a relatively universal context of adolescents' everyday functioning. This result accords with research indicating a gradual attenuation of gender differences in digital behaviour and online activities (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). Likewise, the lack of an established relationship between school type and excessive internet use suggests that the institutional educational framework may not be the primary differentiating factor in this domain.

The absence of a demonstrated relationship between parental control and excessive internet use raises an important interpretive issue. Simple models based on restriction and control appear insufficient in the context of adolescents' digital behaviour. The quality of parental mediation, communication, and the broader relational climate may be more consequential, in line with studies of parental strategies in online environments (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). Control alone, without an understanding of the function served by digital activities, may therefore fail to reduce risky behaviour. The preventive role of the school therefore lies not only in regulating behaviour, but also in creating a relationally safe environment in which students encounter trust, respect, social and emotional support, and clear boundaries (Šimek, 2025b).

No statistically significant difference was confirmed between adolescents who preferred individual and group-based leisure activities. This finding may be interpreted in light of the changing meaning of social interaction in the digital age, in which online environments allow individual and social experience to overlap. Digital activities may simultaneously provide social contact and an avenue for individual escape, thereby partly dissolving the traditional dichotomy between time spent alone and time spent with others (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011).

The statistically significant relationship between excessive internet use and subjectively perceived psychological distress may be regarded as the study's central finding. The effect size (Cramér's $V = 0.226$) indicates a practically meaningful rather than merely statistically significant association. This result resonates with the study's initial conceptual framework, particularly the understanding of the digital environment as a specific psychosocial context of adolescent development (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011), within which online activities are inseparably connected to adolescents' emotional state. Greater excessive internet use was associated with greater psychological distress, consistent with empirical studies linking

intensive online behaviour to adverse aspects of mental health (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Nesi & Prinstein, 2015; Soriano-Molina et al., 2025). From a pedagogical and psychological perspective, this relationship may also signal that risky digital behaviour is not necessarily an isolated individual problem, but may reflect broader conditions involving school climate, relational insecurity, weakened social support, and accumulated psychosocial strain (Šimek, 2025a). It must nevertheless be stressed that the cross-sectional design does not permit the direction of this association to be determined.

The interpretation of this relationship must therefore remain open. Excessive internet use may contribute to psychological distress through sleep disruption, fragmented attention, or intensified social comparison, while also functioning as a coping strategy for individuals who are already experiencing distress. This bidirectional account corresponds to the concept of dynamic reciprocity, according to which both processes occur simultaneously and are moderated by contextual factors such as personality characteristics, the quality of offline relationships, and the specific type of online activity (Valkenburg et al., 2006; Chen & Fan, 2024). More recent longitudinal research (Soriano-Molina et al., 2025) further indicates that adolescents experiencing greater psychological difficulties, loneliness, or depressive symptoms tend to be more susceptible to problematic internet use, while excessive use itself further intensifies these difficulties, producing a mutually reinforcing spiral that substantially complicates causal interpretations of cross-sectional data. These findings fully support the study's initial premise, formulated on the basis of Subrahmanyam and Šmahel's theory (2011) and developed in the Introduction, that the digital environment cannot be understood as a neutral space but rather as a psychosocially embedded context that interacts reciprocally with adolescents' emotional state.

The findings therefore support an approach that situates adolescents' digital behaviour within the broader psychosocial context of everyday functioning rather than treating it in isolation. Reducing the issue to time spent online appears inadequate; understanding the function that digital activities serve in an adolescent's life is more informative. This shift from a quantitative to a functional conceptualisation of digital behaviour is increasingly emphasised in the contemporary literature (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014), alongside the need to interpret adolescent behaviour in relation to the school environment, relational bonds, and subjective experience, all of which jointly shape adaptive and risk-related patterns of conduct (Šrobárová, 2021; Budayová, 2020).

The findings must be interpreted in light of the study's limitations. The research relied on a convenience sample drawn from a single region, which substantially restricts the generalisability of the results to the wider adolescent population in the Czech Republic. The cross-sectional design precludes the examination of developmental dynamics and the establishment of causal relationships among variables. A central methodological limitation concerns the operationalisation of psychological well-being through a single dichotomous self-report item focused on predominant mood. Psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct, and measuring it through one item without established psychometric properties means that the results cannot be interpreted in a clinically or psychologically meaningful sense, but only as an indicative measure of subjective emotional experience. Consequently, the statistically significant relationship demonstrated between this variable and excessive internet use cannot be generalised as evidence of a relationship between excessive internet use and psychological well-being in its full psychological conceptualisation. Similarly, operationalising parental mediation through a single item captures only one partial dimension of this construct, and the findings relating to H4 must therefore be interpreted with considerable caution. Dichotomising the continuous EIU data may also have reduced the statistical sensitivity of the analyses. Finally, the use of additional self-report measures represents a further limitation because responses may have been affected by subjective bias.

Despite these limitations, the study makes an important contribution to understanding the relationship between digital behaviour and adolescents' psychological well-being. The findings underscore the importance of subjective experience while qualifying the role of several traditionally assumed factors, including sex, school type, and simple parental control. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs, operationalise psychological well-being in greater detail, and examine the motivational dimensions of internet use more deeply.

Conclusion

The present study contributes to a more precise understanding of the relationship between adolescents' digital behaviour, the structure of their leisure time, and subjectively perceived psychological distress. The data showed that neither the selected demographic variables nor several commonly assumed contextual characteristics emerged as significant correlates in the sample, whereas a clear association was observed between greater excessive internet use and greater psychological distress.

The findings support the view that adolescents' digital behaviour cannot be interpreted solely on the basis of the extent of online activity or simple external indicators. A more appropriate approach considers the subjective meaning of the internet environment in an adolescent's life, the individual's emotional state, and the broader psychosocial context of everyday functioning. From this perspective, excessive internet use should not be viewed in isolation but in relation to psychological experience and the potential regulatory functions of online activities.

The practical significance of the findings lies in the implication that preventive and intervention efforts in school and counselling settings should not be based primarily on restriction and control, but on understanding the function of digital activities in adolescents' lives and supporting balanced psychosocial functioning. School-based prevention should therefore be conceived less as an isolated response to manifestations of problematic behaviour and more as systemic care for students' psychological well-being, in which the consistently embedded work of a school psychologist can play an important role (Šimek & Slavík, 2026). These recommendations must nevertheless be regarded as preliminary, as they are derived from a methodologically limited cross-sectional study using a convenience sample rather than from sufficiently substantiated conclusions. Their validity requires verification in methodologically more robust samples using longitudinal designs and standardised instruments for measuring psychological well-being.

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