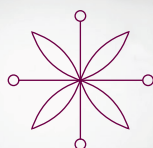


The Abstract Book of the 22nd European Conference on Developmental Psychology



August 25-29, 2025
Vilnius, Lithuania

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DIGITAL RISKS IN CHILDHOOD: IDENTIFYING PROFILES OF PROBLEMATIC INTERNET USE IN 7-13-YEAR-OLDS

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Objective. While problematic internet use (PIU) has been widely studied in elder adolescents and adults, younger children remain underexplored. Researches often examine PIU in isolation, despite its strong links to screen time (ST) and mental health problems (e.g., Restrepo et al., 2020; Chen & Fan, 2024). These associations became particularly pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to increased ST and potentially exacerbated PIU and its psychological consequences. This study applies Latent Class Analysis with covariates to classify children (7–13 years) based on PIU, screen time, and emotional and behavioral difficulties, using a multidimensional approach to identify PIU profiles and examine the predictive role of age, gender, and parental education.

Methods. Data from 869 Lithuanian children (mean age = 9.94 years, 47.4% girls) were analyzed. The sample, collected between 2020 spring – 2023 winter (COVID and early post-COVID period), relied on parental reports of PIU (Compulsive Internet Use Scale), leisure ST, and total difficulties (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, SDQ).

Results. A three-class model provided the best fit. Among 7–13-year-olds, low-risk users (33.4%) showed moderate PIU and ST with low SDQ difficulties; moderate-risk users (54.9%) had higher PIU, increased ST, and elevated SDQ difficulties; high-risk users (11.7%) exhibited severe PIU, excessive leisure ST (~5 hrs/day), and significant emotional and behavioral problems. Older children and boys were significantly more likely to belong to the higher risk group, while parental education did not significantly predict risk level. Overall, demographic factors did not distinguish between moderate- and high-risk users.

Conclusions. As demographic factors alone do not explain risk transitions, additional individual or contextual factors may contribute. High-risk users not only had severe PIU but also had more emotional and behavioral difficulties and excessive leisure ST. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive, developmentally sensitive interventions addressing ST regulation and mitigation of emotional and behavioral problems risks.