

Evidence of Social Media Addiction and Problematic Internet Use Among High School and University Students in Cyprus

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Abstract : Excessive use of social networking sites (SNS) and the Internet by high school pupils and university students, can cause consequences similar to those observed in substance or gambling related addictions, negatively influence individual well-being notwithstanding self-assessments that people make about their life and experiences. The present study examined, for the first time in Cyprus, the levels of problematic use of the Social Media and the Internet among Cypriot pupils and students aiming at contributing to the discussion about the need for a more conclusive policy framework in the island. The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) and the Generalized Problematic Internet Use Scale 2 (GPIUS-2) were adapted to a Cypriot version and along with a sociodemographic questionnaire were introduced to a sample of 1059 young persons in order to respectively assess the addiction risk for Social Media Use and the risk of Problematic Internet Use. The sample consisted of 59% females, aged 15 to 35 (M=18.9 years, SD=3.20), 465 of them were high school students and 594 university students. Of 1059 respondents from 4 high-schools and 5 Universities (HEI) in Cyprus, 8.3% of the sample had BSMAS scores suggestive of addiction. Approximately a quarter of the sample (24%), demonstrated GPIUS-2 scores suggestive of high risk for problematic internet use. It is notable that differences seem to exist across gender with the score of the female population (11.1%) reaching levels of addiction to social media more than twice the level of addiction of the male population (4.3%). Also, the female population of high school students seems to be at the most vulnerable position for problematic internet use (28%). The 26% of the sample often or very often used some SNSs to forget of personal problems. The results of this study show that half of those surveyed used the Internet to feel better when they were upset or to escape the isolation they felt. Among the sample population, the study reports that 60% of the pupils and female university students are in agreement with the relevant statements. Conclusively, this study suggests that SNSs addiction levels among pupils and students in Cyprus ought to be an important public health concern. The same if not more alarming is the identified by the study prevalence of problematic Internet use among the same population. These results confirm international trends reported by scholarly research while also suggest that particular categories such as high school pupils and young females may be more exposed to problem SNSs and Internet use. Preventive strategies need first to acknowledge the problem in order to then formulate an effective strategy for prevention and intervention. For relevant authorities it is of primary importance to "exploit" the fact that high schools and universities can be seen as small communities and units potentially available for forging alliances for healthy Social Media and Internet use.

Keywords : problematic internet use, social media addiction, social networking sites, well-being

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