


photo: Juliána Odziomková



The Centre for the Prevention of Internet Addiction has been established in Slovakia

Nowadays digital technologies, tablets, smartphones and especially the Internet are natural parts of our lives. We use them to study, to work and to gain information but also to relax or to have fun. It is obvious that they bring a lot of positives, they speed up communication, make our activities more effective and bury the boredom. Aside from the new opportunities which especially the Internet brings us it is very important to be aware of the risks and dangers associated with its usage.

The explosion of information and communication technologies has caused people to perceive the boundaries between real and virtual, cyberspace and real geographic environment. Overlapping these interfaces can ultimately have multiple negative effects on users. One of these is an addiction to digital media and the Internet. Many experts point out that Internet addiction is not considered to be a diagnosis yet. However it has comparable principles to any other addiction. This is so-called non-substance addiction caused by a certain type of behavior. According to many experts, Internet addiction is closest to pathological gambling.

That is why Slovakia has decided to markedly appeal on prevention in this sphere and on the occasion of the International Safe Internet Day on February 7, 2017 the civic association eSlovensko opened the Center for the Prevention of Internet Addiction in Bratislava. The founding organization is the civic association eSlovensko as part of the project *Zodpovedne.sk* which is also supported by the European Union. The partners of the projects are the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic and the non-profit organization Children's Safety Line. Since 2007 there have been a number of activities carried out on the issue of the responsible use of the Internet, education, prevention and protection of children and youth in Slovakia. *neZavislost.sk* is part of the eSlovensko projects which have received more than 30 Slovak and international awards since its inception in 2002. The civic association eSlovensko has created many successful projects in education, prevention and protection of children and young people (e.g. *Zodpovedne.sk*, *Ovce.sk*, *Kybersikanovanie.sk*, *Sidliskovysen.sk*, *Nehejtuj.sk*, *NoProblemos.sk*, *MatFilipa.sk*, *Help.sk*, *Stopline.sk* and others) and it is constantly striving to raise awareness of the risks and traps by which children and young people are endangered.

The main objectives of the Center for Internet Addiction include:

- To inform about the phenomenon, its prevention and therapy, for which the web site www.nezavislost.sk is used.
- A professional platform that will create and maintain an active network of experts, professionals working at universities, research institutes and in counseling.
- Research about online addiction issues at both the Slovak and international level.
- Establish a network of help centers in the regions so that children or parents can contact experts in their local areas.
- Introducing the pilot version of the app *neZávislosť* that serves as a tool for prevention and research.

Who is that project designed for? The target group can be divided into three basic categories as follows:

1. The project has been created primarily for smartphone and Internet users. For them a free android mobile app is designed and it has an informative and preventive aim. It measures time spent on mobile and individual applications anonymously. It shows a daily, weekly and general chart and it also offers an Internet addiction test, a recommendation rotating card, a joy and worry notebook, a timeline, a motivation group or data sharing and exporting function, while helping to self-educate and gain balance between time spent online and offline.
2. The professional public, whose applied research will provide information about risk and social factors and predispositions to addictions and addictive behavior of users. The project is beneficial to psychiatrists, psychotherapists, psychologists, school psychologists, special pedagogues, social therapists, social workers and others.
3. The general public for whom the Internet portal Nezavislost.sk provides useful information, recommendations and professional assistance. The project helps parents, families, schools, state institutions, the private and the third sector or media to understand the modern phenomenon of online addiction.

Project manager J. Tomková said for Zodpovedne.sk that after Nehejtuj.sk and Kyberšikanovanie.sk which also dealt with the threats of the Internet, the role of neZavislost.sk should be a routine task. However during the time the project team has found that “non-addiction” is a more complex issue. On the basis of these facts the project has been expanded by additional experts, international studies and mobile application development.

The first results mapping the usage of the app *neZávislosť* available from march 2017 are also interesting. One month after the start of the android app it had 1574 downloads. The average daily online time of all app users is 3 hours, the longest use time of the mobile app was 17 and 13 hours a day. From these conclusions it also follows that Internet addiction is a clearly expanding phenomenon and it is necessary to deal with this issue. Therefore, it can be concluded with pleasure that in Slovakia, there is a space and especially experts who know how to provide valuable advice to threatened or addicted users, to give them a helping hand and to lead them in the right direction.

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