Background

- Problematic Internet use (PIU) is a new health related phenomenon characterized by a condition in which Internet use interferes with life activities and decreases quality of life.
- This has become a great challenge for prevention since risk factors as well as protective factors are most likely to be psychosocial but have not been established yet.
- Caplan (2010) has proposed a model according to which preference for online social interaction to face to face interaction is a construct based on beliefs that one is safer and more confident when interacting with people online. This construct is considered a to be trigger for potential PIU.

This study aims to explore which psychosocial risk and protective factors are relevant for problematic Internet use. In particular, the Big Five personality factors (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness) Optimism, Social Support and Depression were explored in relation to PIU.

Theoretical model of Problematic Internet Use

Deficient Self-regulation
Preference for online social interaction
Mood regulation
Negative outcomes

Materials and methods

Sample
University students studying in Slovakia n=697 (mean age 21.28; SD=1.93; 60% female).

Measures
- Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) - Extraversion, Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness.
- Life Orientation Test (LOT) - Optimism
- Modified version of Beck’s Depression Inventory (MBDI) - Depression
- Multidimensional Perceived Social support Scale (MPSS) - Social support
- General Problematic Internet Use Scale (GPU2) - Preference of online social interaction, Problematic Internet Use

Statistical analyses
The data analysed using stepwise regression analysis in SPSS 21.

Results

Model 1: Risk and Protective Factors in relation to Preference for online social Interactions to Face to Face interactions

Extraversion***
Agreeableness
Conscientiousness
Emotional stability***
Openness to experience
Social Support
Depression***
Optimism*

Model 1: F=20.988, p<0.001, R²=0.163

Model 2: Risk and Protective Factors in relation to Overall Problematic Internet Use

Extraversion***
Agreeableness
Conscientiousness
Emotional stability*
Openness to experience
Social support
Depression***
Optimism*

Model 2: F=18.432, p<0.001, R²=0.153

Conclusions

- Depression was found to be the strongest risk factor for PIU but preference for online communication was more closely associated with low extraversion.
- Trait optimism was found to have a protective effect with respect to both preference for online communication and PIU.
- Generally, Big Five factors extraversion and emotional stability were found to be associated with PIU negatively.
- Surprisingly, social support did not play a significant role.
- PIU is a relatively new phenomenon in health research and prevention. While the results of this study are generally in line with previous research, it is important that future studies focus more closely how risk/protective factors affect the development of a vicious loop in PIU.

References