

# Internet addiction and school burnout feed into each other

May 24 2016

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Excessive internet use contributes to the development of school burnout. School burnout, in turn, may lead to excessive internet use or digital addiction. Mind the Gap, a longitudinal research project funded by the Academy of Finland, has established a link between digital addiction and school burnout in both comprehensive school and upper secondary school students. The results of the Finnish study were published in May 2016 in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*.

The findings show that via [school burnout](#), adolescents' excessive internet use can ultimately lead to depression. Exposure to digital addiction is most likely to happen if the adolescent loses interest in school and feels cynicism towards school.

## Fostering enthusiasm for learning is paramount

The research suggests that the most critical stage for tackling the problem of digital addiction and school burnout is age 13-15. The most effective way of supporting adolescents' mental health and preventing excessive internet use is to promote school engagement, to build up students' motivation to learn, and to prevent school burnout.

Depressive symptoms and school burnout in late adolescence are more common among girls than boys. Boys suffer more from excessive Internet use than girls.

The study was carried out among Helsinki adolescents aged 12-14 and 16-18. The former group of early adolescents consisted of lower-school 6th graders born in 2000. The late adolescents were first-year upper secondary school students born in 1997. In all more than 3,000 Helsinki adolescents from 33 lower schools and 18 upper secondary schools took part.

The Academy-funded project is the first longitudinal study exploring the reciprocal associations between excessive internet use, [school engagement](#), school burnout and depression among adolescents. Today's young people are described as 'digital natives': they are the first generation who have grown up with mobile devices and social media.

The digital transformation has two facets. On the one hand, earlier research has shown that the internet provides important and pleasurable social experiences that are useful in later studies and eventually in the workplace. The pedagogical use of digital technology can also engage and inspire young people to take an interest in science and technology. On the other hand, digital addiction can also cause burnout in [adolescents](#) and even lead to depression.

**More information:** Katariina Salmela-Aro et al, The Dark Side of Internet Use: Two Longitudinal Studies of Excessive Internet Use, Depressive Symptoms, School Burnout and Engagement Among Finnish Early and Late Adolescents, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s10964-016-0494-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0494-2)

Provided by Academy of Finland

Citation: Internet addiction and school burnout feed into each other (2016, May 24) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

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