Abstract

**Background:** Behavioral addictions, particularly so-called online addictions, have become a highly active research area. Nowadays, addictive behavior towards computer games can be included into other risky activities in adolescence such as substance abuse. The connection to personality traits is now being studied by many mental health professionals. The idea of correlation between the effect of excessive online gaming and the personal history of adolescents who are currently treated in a juvenile facility for substance abuse led me towards writing this study.

**Aims:** This thesis aims to present the connection between addictive behavior and online gaming, specifically, the connection between playing computer games in childhood and excessive substance abuse later in adolescence. The goal of this study is to describe the development of excessive online gaming towards substance abuse in the cases of chosen adolescents. The thesis focuses on the occurrence of the combination of selected phenomena in the subject’s development considering motivation, while also looking at the personal experiences of respondents. The study of personality traits is also specifically studied in connection to high-risk behavior and other factors that may influence the development of addictive behavior.

**Methods:** The concept of this study comes from a qualitative research approach as a multiple case study. The sample size consisted of three respondents who were selected by purposeful sample method. The data was collected using the method of unstructured interview, as well as personal written testimonies by the respondents, and accessible reports and consultations with other professionals (teachers, psychologists, tutors). This data was evaluated based on selected literature, internal discussions and special supervision with psychologists in the team of the facility.

**Results:** Case studies present the connections to important psychological, family related and developmental circumstances in the origin and development of addiction. The results correspond with the theoretical knowledge of previous research. The results indicate that excessive online gaming at a relatively young age (around 11 – 13 years of age) have a negative impact in the development of the individual, and may lead to problems later in life. Based on the results of this study we can say that there are comparable risk factors for the development of adolescent behavioral and substance addictions. Personal characteristics, especially impulsivity and the desire for novelty, combined with dysfunctional family relationships and other opportunities such as social environment and the influence of peer groups, can lead individuals into developing dependence.

**Conclusion:** This study indicates the need or further research in the field of behavioral addictions, and also the need for early diagnosis and identifying risk groups of children and adolescents. There is also a need to focus on prevention and interventions in lower age groups, including education-oriented programs for parents and pediatricians. Conclusion of this thesis focuses on the role of the addictologist in a juvenile facility.

**Key words:** behavioral addictions – online gaming – high risk behavior – personality traits – impulsivity – substance abuse in adolescence