

# Trajectories of excessive Internet use in families (VEIF)

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## Problem description

Excessive Internet use of adolescents is not only in the focus of mass media, it is also investigated empirically by various scientific disciplines. Results of international surveys confirm a connection with family factors. So far, however, no longitudinal studies have been conducted to describe this connection more precisely.

For this reason, the focus of the VEIF study is on the course of excessive Internet use by adolescents and later young adults, with special attention to the family.

## Objective and Research questions

For the development of suitable prevention measures, diagnostic tools or interventions, a thorough knowledge of the phenomenon 'excessive Internet use' and its trajectories is necessary. The VEIF project is a contribution to the basic research that is required to achieve these objectives. Using quantitative methods, data regarding excessive Internet use and familial aspects will be collected over a total period of 9 years. The following research questions are leading:

- At what age and for what reason do adolescents start to use the Internet excessively?
- If adolescents stop their excessive Internet use, how much time has elapsed since they showed excessive Internet use for the first time?
- Are the individual trajectories influenced by the family?

## Research methods

This study follows a multi-perspective research approach. It is assumed that excessive Internet use in families becomes a problem when it is perceived as such

by family members. The perspective of the caregiver or the parent is not necessarily shared by the adolescents. Furthermore, a subjective perception of excessive Internet use must not be in accordance with a scientific definition of excessive Internet use. For this reason, within the framework of a quantitative questionnaire survey, family dyads (consisting of an adolescent and a caregiver or a parent) are questioned about their subjective view of the problem and instruments of addiction research (YDQ, IGDS) are used.

In order to be able to depict the specific problem progressions on the basis of the data, primarily a group with an increased risk of excessive Internet use is being investigated. This is assumed if a media use problem is perceived at least by the educators or adolescents. The proportion of recruited adolescents with problematic media use is higher in the sample than in the general population (so-called "oversampling"). In order to be able to make comparisons with families without any problem definition, a control group is also included.

The quantitative data collection comprises a total of eight waves. At the first survey date (2016), 1095 family dyads were interviewed, and at the sixth survey date (2021), data could be collected from 474 families. The analysis focuses, among other things, on the areas of family climate, media education, mental health and formal education as well as their predictive significance for excessive Internet use among adolescents over time.

### **Project duration**

august 2015 - mai 2025