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## PHONOHOLISM AS A SIGN OF 'ALWAYS ON' GENERATION – RESEARCH REPORT

### Abstract

The article presents research on the risk of phonoholism occurring among high school students. Strong attachment to a cell phone, for many students, can be an indicator of serious problems. Thanks to utilizing in research the diagnostic survey method, 450 high school students, from all over Poland, could express their opinions on the dangers associated with using a mobile phone. Their opinions were analysed in terms of the ability to use a smartphone rationally, including the possibility of temporarily quitting or limiting the use of a mobile phone. Survey data analysis showed that students do not notice any negative effects of using a cell phone, at the same time they declare that functioning without a phone would be very difficult or even impossible for them. The results suggest that such risk do exist in some extent, for this reason, more emphasis should be placed on preventive measures that can help effectively to protect students against phonoholism.

**Keywords:** Youth, smartphone, addiction, phonoholism, 'always on'

## FONOHOLIZM JAKO ZNAK POKOLENIA „ALWAYS ON” – RAPORT Z BADAŃ

### Abstrakt

W artykule przedstawiono badania dotyczące zagrożenia fonoholizmem występującego wśród młodzieży szkół średnich. Silne przywiązanie do telefonu komórkowego może być dla wielu uczniów zwiastunem poważnych problemów. Dzięki wykorzystaniu w badaniach metody sondażu diagnostycznego 450 uczniów szkół średnich z terenu całej Polski mogło wyrazić swoje opinie na temat zagrożeń związanych z używaniem telefonu komórkowego. Ich opinie zostały przeanalizowane pod kątem umiejętności racjonalnego korzystania ze smartfonu, w tym czasowej możliwości rezygnacji lub ograniczenia używania telefonu komórkowego. Analiza danych z sondażu wykazała, iż

uczniowie nie dostrzegają u siebie negatywnych skutków korzystania z telefonu komórkowego, ale jednocześnie deklarują, iż funkcjonowanie bez telefonu byłoby dla nich bardzo trudne lub wręcz niemożliwe. Wyniki sugerują, że owo zagrożenie w pewnym stopniu występuje i dlatego większy nacisk należy położyć na działania profilaktyczne, które mogą pomóc skutecznie chronić uczniów przed fonoholizmem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** młodzież, telefon komórkowy, uzależnienie, fonoholizm, „always on”

## INTRODUCTION

Modern world offers young people many opportunities in terms of self-development, knowledge acquisition, as well as, establishing and maintaining social contacts. All this is possible mainly thanks to the mass media, among which the Internet has its dominant position together with its unlimited options practically in every sphere of life. Common access to digital media, largely in the mobile form, has a significant impact, especially on the young generation that succumbs to some kind of ‘magic’ of the virtual world. One of such mobile digital devices enabling young people to be always on is smartphone, which has become an inseparable ‘companion’ (gadget) of a young person (Strivastava 2005). Nowadays, young people commonly function between real and virtual world, where they satisfy their youthful needs, spend their free time, seek acceptance and build a sense of belonging (Gardner and Davis 2013). For young people, this means an indispensable need to be ‘always on’, which often leads to a limitation of their ‘face to face’ relationships and increases the risk of their addiction to the Internet and digital mobile devices (Billieux et al. 2015; Dębski 2017). Therefore, if a particular behaviour in life of an individual person has become compulsory and they do not have sufficient control over it, then we can talk about some form of physical but also mental dependence (Andrzejewska 2007; Foerster et al. 2015). This kind of problem is sometimes referred to as so-called behavioural addiction or activity addiction or technological addiction (Griffiths 1996; Rowicka 2015). However, among the researchers who study the discussed phenomenon, many different terms are used to describe it, e.g. ‘problematic mobile phone use’, ‘mobile phone dependence syndrome’, ‘mobile phone addiction’, ‘compulsive mobile phone use’, ‘dysfunctional use of the mobile phone’ (Guerreschi 2006; Pawłowska and Potembska 2011; Billieux 2012). There can also be found the term “nomophobia”, (abbreviation for no- mobile –phone- phobia), which signifies the fear of not having a phone within reach or fear of losing it (Bragazzi and Del Puente 2014). In research studies more and more often can be found the term ‘phonoholism’, which indicates the obsessive need for constant, insuppressible and more and more frequent using a mobile phone or at least having it within sight, which gives the sense of peace, otherwise, there is a sense of discomfort, sometimes also passivity, frustration, aggression, isolation (Belcer and Wojnarowska 2014, 41-43; Kozak 2013).

Frequent signals about abusing mobile phones by adolescents, coming from various educational environments, became an inspiration to undertake research on

the phenomenon of phonoholism among young people. The aim of such research was to get acquainted with the risk of phonoholism occurring among adolescents (students) of secondary schools. The research problem was expressed in the following question: What is the risk of phonoholism occurring among adolescents of secondary schools? In research, there was applied the diagnostic survey method utilizing the questionnaire technique and the research tool in the form of the survey questionnaire. The research was nationwide and was conducted online with the use of Google forms. 450 young respondents took part in the survey. The research results and the conducted analysis allowed to formulate interesting conclusions and observations, as well as, to put forward several pedagogical postulates aimed at the broadly understood social and educational environment.

### 1. PHONOHOLISM AS A NEW ADDICTION

Looking closer at the phenomenon of smartphone addiction, which has quite clearly taken root in the modern world, we want to show not only its nature but also the 'phenomenon' which enters the lives of many young people. Phonoholism as a behavioural disorder is experienced by those people who are not able to function normally without the constant presence (use) of a mobile phone (Dębski 2017, 14-17). When we think of the cause of this phenomenon, we come to the conclusion that it is not so simple to define it, since most often there occur several causes which are interrelated. Among the most frequently mentioned is the issue of unpleasant and painful experiences of adolescents in contact with others (parents, peers, teachers) and disturbed self-esteem (sense of otherness, lack of understanding, fear of loneliness, need for acceptance) (Takao 2014; Smetaniuk 2014). Perhaps, the mobile phone is also an escape from difficulties and school failures, lack of interests and boredom that creeps into life of a young person or is related to bad time management (Andrzejewska 2007, 1189). It can also be a way of expressing oneself and desire to impress others by being hyperactive on social media. The cause of addiction to the 'screen' is also bad family patterns (parents addicted to a smartphone) and the lack of ideas for spending free time together and building lasting family relationships. Another problem is the lack of 'digital education' on the part of parents and school (lack of rules for using digital media) and unlimited access to the Internet on a mobile device (Dębski 2017, 34-41). The emergence of this type of situation can lead young people to addiction, but as it is easy to notice, this is not only their problem but also those people whose duty it is to protect them from it. Young people, disappointed today with the world of adults which do not notice their needs and expectations, run away to virtual reality, where they try desperately to solve their problems and find suitable interlocutors.

Phonoholism in the life of a young person does not appear unexpectedly, but it is a gradual process successively growing stronger, which after some time becomes a real problem for a young person and their surroundings. The research conducted so far on the phenomenon of smartphone addiction allows us to distinguish its

several stages (phases). The first one is the so-called initial phase, its most common symptoms in adolescents are the increasing experience of the pleasure of being online, combined with a loss of sense of time and a growing desire to use the smartphone more and more often. In this way, the telephone becomes for young people an attractive “object” of interest and an entertainment centre, to which they gradually start to subordinate their daily functioning. In the next step, called the warning phase, a young person finds it difficult to part with his or her phone and insistently looks for opportunities to stay longer and longer on the Internet (frequent checking of notifications and favourite sites), they do it even in hiding, reducing, in this way, the emerging internal tension. The third phase, called critical, is already characterized by a significant loss of control over one’s own behaviour, which is “dominated” by the mobile phone. The phone becomes an inseparable companion of a young person who feels a sense of compulsion to use it, combined with neglect of rational nutrition, sleep and a decline in other interests not related to the network (learning, household chores, social meetings). In the case of limitation of access to the telephone reveals a whole spectrum of negative emotions (anxiety, irritation, nervousness, anger, fear), and also various types of conflicts and lies related to the use of a mobile phone. The last, so-called chronic phase (proper addiction), takes the form of an acute, even obsessive attachment to the telephone (being online), associated with constant readiness (regardless of time and place), to answer and reply to all kinds of messages, but also by means of a mobile phone to publish photos, videos, posts, build relations and converse. Moreover, keeping a phone around gives an addicted person a very high level of security, which is associated with ignoring and marginalizing other people in their environment and glorifying virtual reality. Over time, these symptoms deepen, “permanently” linking young people with a mobile phone, which gives them only the appearance of freedom and the possibility of choosing values, imposing on them specific patterns of choosing truth, good and beauty (Andrzejewska 2007; Jenaro et al. 2009).

Young people using mobile phones are well-versed in their numerous possibilities over time getting addicted to their preferred functions or smartphone applications. The common addictions related to the use of mobile phones by adolescents include:

- addiction to sending and receiving SMS – signifies compulsion to send and receive text messages. Young people can send up to several hundred messages a day. Their mood and well-being depend on the number of SMSs received on a given day. It happens that they send text messages to people nearby, for instance during lessons, lectures, when they are in a cinema, theatre, church; sometimes they even send them to themselves (e.g. from a computer).

- addiction to having and showing the latest phone models (appearance, price) and the number of calls made – this is the so-called mobile exhibitionism, which among young people can manifest itself through paying great attention to the look of the device (colour, style), as well as its price. Making an appearance,

among peers, with a new phone model and constantly answering and making calls are supposed to prove the popularity in the group, and at the same time to make others envious.

- addiction to the access to an inappropriate content and the use of cyberbullying – a mobile phone gives young people the access to websites offering games and films of inappropriate for them content (violence, pornography). Moreover, video recorders and photo cameras installed in smartphones cause the possibility to spread compromising information, videos, photos, and attack, so-called hating weaker individuals (cyberbullying) (Jarczyńska and Orzechowska 2014; Pawłowska and Potembska 2011).

One of the most serious consequences of young people's addiction to the mobile phone is the progressive withdrawal from the 'outside' world and the reduction of direct interpersonal contacts. Addicted adolescents start to spend more and more time alone, which favours even more intensive use of phone, giving young people the misleading impression of having an extensive network of contacts (Jarczyńska and Orzechowska 2014). Those are, however, often virtual and superficial acquaintances, devoid of 'emotional expression, which fail in the moment of need, causing disappointment and crisis of various types. Moreover, phonoholism among adolescents results in decline of other interests, sudden mood swings, conflicts with relatives and problems at school, etc. (Chóliz 2010). Its serious consequence can also be caused by long-time exposure to electromagnetic fields waves impact emitted by the phone screen, as well as the lack of physical activity, which is so much needed to keep the body in the right shape.

Phonoholism as an addiction to mobile phones, which affects an increasing group of children and adolescents, calls for a bottom-up study, which gives clear and specific indications on how to protect the young generation from it. The indication of selected effects of phonoholism constitutes an attempt to draw attention to the gravity of this social problem. The issue of addiction to mobile phones among the young generation should find its permanent place not only in the school addiction prevention framework, but also in the range of therapeutic help (psychological, psychotherapeutic support) to addicted people or those who are risky users of the tools of the digital world.

## 2. PHONOHOLISM – THE SCALE OF THE PHENOMENON AMONG TEENAGERS

The beginning of the 21st century is the 'era of new addictions'. More and more common is not only the addiction to psychoactive substances (alcohol, nicotine, drugs, or legal highs) but also other addictions called behavioural or activity addictions, among which there is also phonoholism (Belcer and Wojnarowska 2014, 41-43). The new addictions are still not recognized sufficiently. There are lacking diagnostic tools and theories explaining the mechanisms of their formation. We also know little about the prevention and treatment of this kind of behaviours.

The phenomenon of smartphone addiction is relatively recent, which is due to the fact that the mobile phone appeared on the world market about 20 years ago. The first country to spot the problem was China, where they started to write about it. This is also where in the medical literature appeared the new term: mobile phone dependence syndrome (Jarczyńska and Orzechowska 2014).

A review of research on the phenomena of dysfunctional use, abuse and addiction to the Internet proves that the number of users of this medium increases over time. Research conducted in 2015 among adolescents by Joanna Majchrzyk-Mikuła and Małgorzata Matusiak towards the occurrence of phonoholism clearly indicates that the frequency of using a mobile phone causes serious concern. More than eight in ten respondents declare that they use the phone very often or often, and for four in ten (40%) of them, the first thought after waking up concerns is where their telephone is. The same number of people believe that without a telephone 'human does not exist' (41%) (Majchrzyk-Mikuła and Matusiak 2015, 245-246).

The same research shows that in terms of the most characteristic behaviour leading to phonoholism, which is 'not to be parted with a mobile phone', stated that the vast majority (76%) of respondents declare never to leave the phone – in any situation. At the same time, almost the same number of them never leave their home without it, or they come back then they realize that they do not have it with them. When it comes to the emotional response in situations when there is no cell phone or it is difficult to use it, the respondents display definitely negative emotions (61%). Less than 1/5 of them (15%) carry a charger or a spare battery, which shows a certain inconsistency, since the negative emotions alone do not cause taking actions to eliminate this unpleasant state. The problem with turning off the phone in situations that require it (church, university classes, cinema, theatre, train, meeting with friends) is particularly visible among the respondents. While today it does not seem inappropriate to use phone on the bus or on the street (although until recently it was treated as undesirable behaviour, especially in case of loud conversations), using it in the cinema, theatre, and even in church cannot be considered appropriate. We are dealing with a situation where the functions of a given institution or place are not fully used in relation to their primary purpose (Majchrzyk-Mikuła and Matusiak 2015, 247-230).

Research conducted by the Dbam o Mój Zasięg Foundation and the University of Gdańsk in 2015-2016 among 20,000 students between 12 and 18 years of age indicates many important aspects of using smartphones. It is worth noticing the most important ones. First of all, the systematic use of one's own mobile phone starts at the average age of 10 (in large cities, the initiation age drops to 7-8 years). Secondly, over one-third of the surveyed adolescents cannot imagine their daily functioning without a mobile phone or smartphone. Thirdly, the surveyed students are frequent users of social networking sites. An account on at least one of them has 87% of respondents, while more than half of the adolescents surveyed declare having an account on two portals. Almost every fifth research participant

uses Facebook several dozen times a day. However, it is disturbing that some of the surveyed adolescents use social networks in a reckless way, inviting people whom they do not know at all (35%). It is worth noting that to the question "Are you a person addicted to a mobile phone?" every fifth student's (20.8%) answer is affirmative (Dębski 2017, 22-27).

A study carried out a few years later, at the turn of 2019 and 2020 by Mobiem Polska using the CAWI technique, on a nationwide sample of young people aged 15-35, yielded extremely disturbing data. According to the data obtained, young Poles are 'welded' to smartphones. Most do not part with them even at night. More than 60% of people aged 15 to 35 do not part with their smartphones during the day. These devices accompany young people everywhere – during social meetings, in the toilet and in the bedroom (82% of the respondents). Is it possible to do without a smartphone all day?. It turns out that nearly 70% of people are ready to return home for a smartphone, even if this is to result in being late for an agreed date of an appointment (*Młodzi Polacy* 2020).

The most disturbing data, however, concerns the use of mobile devices by children. They show that two-thirds of parents of children between the ages of 2 and 5 (64%) declare that they use mobile devices. On average, they spend half an hour with them, a little more, because only a few minutes longer, they spend reading books. For comparison, they take less than two hours a day to play with their parents, and an hour and a half to play with other children. Only 35.5% of parents did not give their children smartphones and tablets. The average time young children spend in front of screens is 49 minutes, which is more than a lesson unit. Meanwhile, doctors emphasize that children under the age of 3 should not do it at all (Pochrzęst-Motyczyńska 2019). Against this background, there appears a great need to take specific preventive actions.

Developing among young people a rational approach to the use of mobile digital devices, especially mobile phones, is one of the urgent tasks faced by the modern system of social prevention (Rowicka 2015). Activities aimed at counteracting phonoholism should generally focus on three basic educational environments which play a special role in the lives of young people. The first of these environments is the family, the proper functioning of which has a major impact on the course of the upbringing and socialization of a young person. Its 'preventive' potential in the field of phonoholism prevention can be expressed especially by building strong and deep family ties and relationships, parental involvement in children's matters and problems, spending time together and sharing common passions and interests (Dębski 2017; Miner 2020). These are just some of the 'advantages' of a family that can make a child happy and open to direct interpersonal contacts, without the need to close themselves in the virtual world. The school is the second environment which through its didactic and educational influence, can adequately stimulate the functioning of the young generation. By providing knowledge and developing appropriate "habits", it becomes an important link in the process of making young people aware of the serious

risks associated with addiction to a mobile phone (Dębski 2017, 39-42; Belcer and Wojnarowska 2014, 46). The third environment with a significant preventive value, protecting young people from phonoholism, is the peer group, which is a natural field of young people own activity (interests, passions). The awareness that one is accepted and understood in a group, discovering values together and searching for the meaning of life, teaches young people to be responsible for their own lives, and at the same time protects them against the compelling action of the digital world (Strivastava 2005; Rowicka 2015). The interpenetrating interaction of these natural environments of adolescents' life activity (family, school, peer group) builds the belief in the young generation that contacts in the virtual world are never able to replace direct contacts between people. The promotion of a healthy lifestyle, free from any enslavement, is in the interest of the whole society, and even in the global interest, because only a free man, creative in their thinking and acting can meet the challenges of the future.

### 3. SMARTPHONE ADDICTION AMONG YOUTH – SELF-REPORTED STUDY

The aim of the self-reported research was to get the opinions of young people on the use of a mobile phone – the frequency of this activity, the circumstances in which they reach for the telephone, the effects of excessive use of this tool. The research – due to the epidemiological situation in the country – was conducted via the Internet in March and April 2021. 450 students of secondary schools participated in them. Due to the incompleteness of the answers, 415 questionnaires were analysed. The criterion for the selection of the respondents was the availability of the group. 241 respondents (which constitutes 58% of the total number of respondents) are women, 174 people (which constitute 42%) – men.

The largest group (33.5%) was constituted by adolescents at the age of 16, slightly smaller (28.5%) at the age of 17, and 18% – at the age of 18. The smaller group (10%) turned out to be the respondents aged 15 and 9% aged 19. 20-year-olds constituted 1% of the respondents. The age of the respondents turned out to be varied, which undoubtedly gives a more complete view of the issue from the perspective of representatives of students of all grades of secondary schools. It is worth adding that most of the respondents (82%) come from complete families. 13% of the respondents are young people growing up in incomplete families; 4% in reconstructed families. The smallest group (0.2% of respondents) are adolescents whose parents are currently separated, and (0.2%) are in a foster family.

The respondents were asked to assess the financial situation of their family. Half of the respondents (50%) assessed it as good; 27% as very good; 22% – as an average. The smallest group (2%) were young people who described the family situation as bad. None of the respondents described it as very bad.

It is worth noting that the largest group of the surveyed youth (51.5%) declares that they spend on the phone 4 hours or more every day; 27% – 3 hours; 15.5%



– 2 hours. Only 6.5% of respondents stated that they only use a mobile phone for 1 hour during the day. It is worth emphasizing that 99.3% of respondents (412 people) indicated that they have permanent Internet access on their mobile phones. Only 3 respondents (0.7%) replied that they had no access.

The vast majority of secondary school students (85%) most often use the telephone in their family home. 12% indicated they do it in public places. It is optimistic that only 2.5% of the respondents indicated that they use the telephone at school. Only 0.5% of the respondents admitted that they do it wherever they are.

The mobile phone most often displaces the watch (which was confirmed by 91% of respondents), a calculator (81.5% of all indications), and a calendar (69%). Less often (18%), young people replace the radio with a telephone. Occasionally (0.5% of responses), an MP3 player, notebook/planner and a TV set. Only 1 person (which constitutes 0.2% of respondents) pointed to the flashlight.

The two main problems that were raised were formulated as questions – how important is the mobile phone in the life of modern youth? and – what negative effects of using a mobile phone do young people experience and what are the preventive measures they take? Research analyses allow presenting many important conclusions that should be classified into two basic areas.

### 3.1. The mobile phone and its place in the lives of adolescents

In the modern world, the mobile phone is very important, it constitutes the so-called “must have” among teenagers. It has many functions and is a kind of “link with the world”. Therefore, young people were asked where most of their contacts with other people take place – in the real environment or in the virtual world? The answers are presented in Chart1.

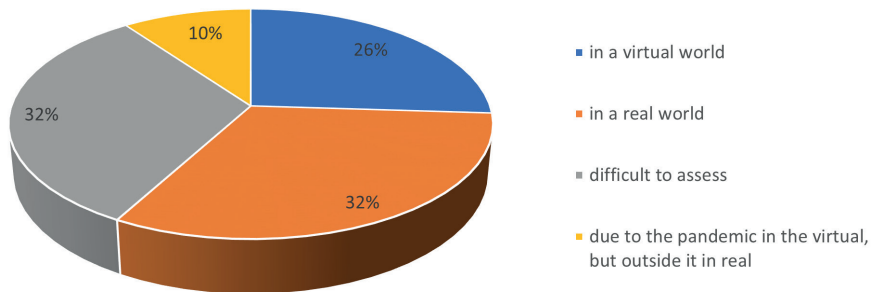


Chart 1. The environment of the majority of adolescents' contacts. Source: self-reported study.

The presented data clearly show that the position of the respondents is quite diverse. 32% of respondents (134 people) believe that most of their contacts with others take place in the real world. Exactly the same number – 32% say that only due to the ongoing pandemic, these contacts moved to the virtual world, but before that

time they definitely took place in the real world. 26% of respondents (110 people) indicate that it is a virtual space. It is worth noting that as many as 32% believe that they cannot assess it unambiguously. Therefore, it should be assumed that the reality related to the pandemic and the need for distance learning to a large extent transferred a significant part of the life of young people to the so-called virtual world.

Therefore, the young people were asked directly if they could function without a mobile phone. Their answers are presented in Chart 2.

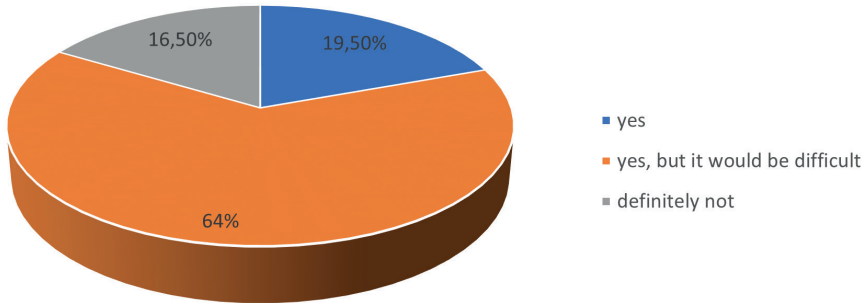


Chart 2. Ability to function without a mobile phone. Source: self-reported study.

The vast majority of respondents (64%) indicated that they could live without a mobile phone, but it would be very difficult for them. 19.5% felt they would be able to do so. It is worth emphasizing, however, that 16.5% of respondents clearly state that they definitely cannot imagine life without a mobile phone.

Then the respondents were asked what activities they most often use a mobile phone for.

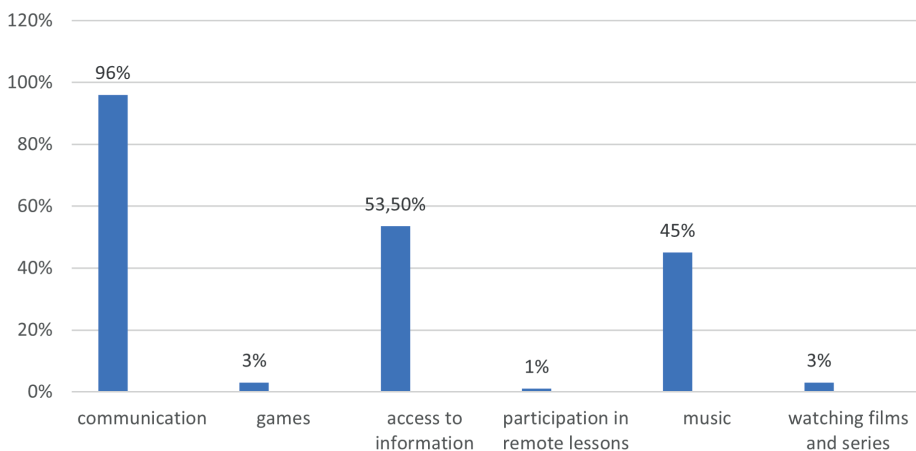


Chart 3. Activities young people use their mobile phone most often for. Source: self-reported study.

Students indicated that they most often use a mobile phone for communication (96%). More than half of the surveyed youth (53.5%) assessed that this activity is the access to information. Slightly less – 45% of respondents – indicated that they use the phone to listen to music. Only 3% of respondents use it to play and watch films/series. It should also be noted that 1% participate in on-line lessons using a connection via mobile phone. Due to the possibility of indicating more than one answer, the percentages do not sum up to 100.

Thus, young people were asked how the mobile phone contributes to the acquisition of knowledge.

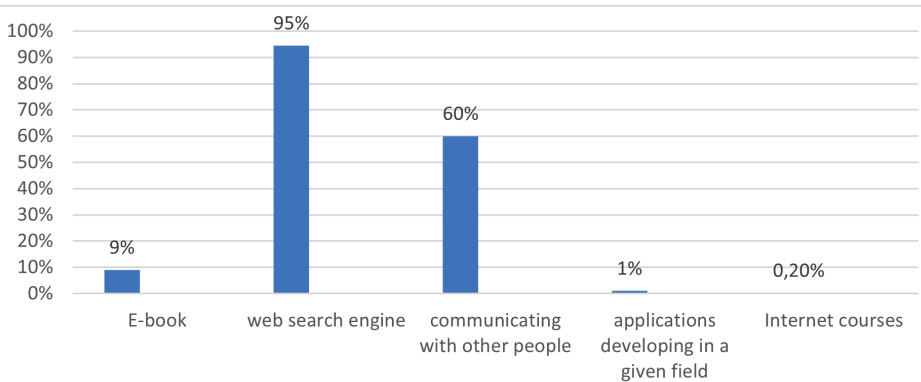


Chart 4. The way in which a mobile phone contributes to the acquisition of knowledge. Source: self-reported study.

The data presented in Chart 4 show that young people most often use the telephone to obtain new information through the Internet search engine (95%). A smaller group are the respondents who use the telephone as a tool that enables them to search for information by communicating with others (60% of respondents). Only 9% read e-books thanks to their phones; 1% use applications developing in a specific field; 0.2% of all respondents use the telephone to participate in online courses. Due to the possibility of indicating more than one answer, the percentages do not sum up to 100.

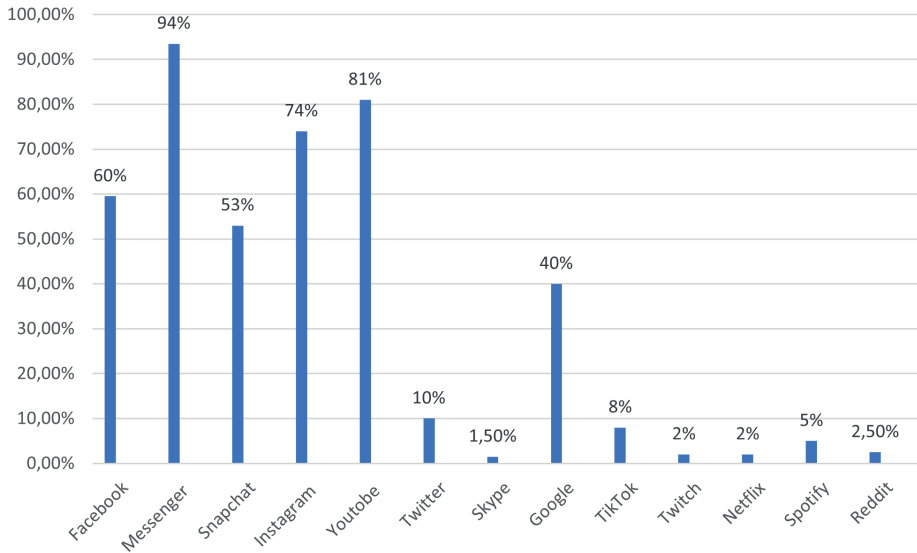


Chart 5. Applications that are most often used by young people. Source: self-reported study.

The data clearly indicate that the applications most often used by adolescents are: Messenger (94%); YouTube (81%); Instagram (74% of respondents); Facebook (60% of respondents) and Snapchat (53%). Less than half of the respondents (40%) use Google. 10% indicated Twitter, slightly less 8% – TikTok. 5% indicated Spotify, 2.5% – Reddit. Only 2% indicated Twitch and Netflix.

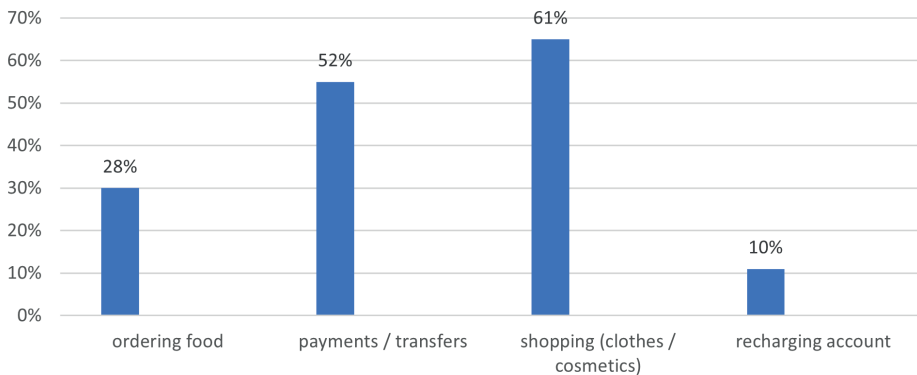


Chart 6. Online activities that young people most often perform using a mobile phone. Source: self-reported study.

The vast majority of young people (61%) do shopping over the phone (clothes, shoes, cosmetics), and make payments / transfers (52% of respondents). Less often (28%) order meals and top up their accounts (10%).

3.2. Negative effects of using a mobile phone by adolescents and the applied preventive measures

The research conducted in this area clearly shows that “frequent use of a mobile phone may have an adverse effect on human health,” (Guzowska 2015, 48) and young people are often unaware of the various consequences of telephone abuse, including “Deepening loneliness in real life, impoverishment of interpersonal relationships, vocabulary, closing oneself in the virtual world, causing family conflicts, inability to solve difficult situations and avoid such situations, and to deal with unpleasant emotions” (Guzowska 2015, 50).

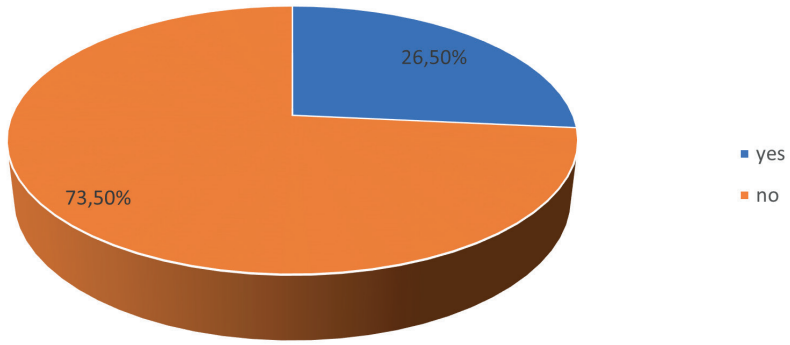


Chart 7. Experience of negative effects of using a mobile phone. Source: self-reported study.

26.5% of respondents (110 people) indicate that they have experienced negative effects of excessive use of a mobile phone. 73.5% (305 respondents) present a contrary opinion. Accordingly, the adolescents were asked what effects they experienced.

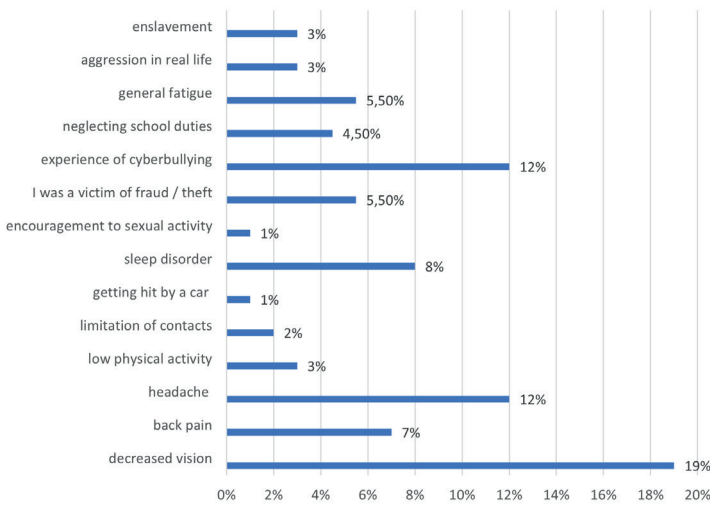


Chart 8. Effects of excessive mobile phone use. Source: self-reported study.

The data presented in Chart 8 clearly indicate that the most frequently experienced effect of excessive use of mobile phone by adolescents is deterioration of sight (19%); headache (12%) and the experience of cyberbullying (12%). Slightly less common are: sleep disturbances (8%), back pain (7%), general fatigue (5.5%) and experience of internet fraud / theft (5.5%). The youth also indicated the neglect of school duties (4.5%), reduced physical activity (3%), and the use of aggression in real life (3%). It is worth noting that 3% of respondents believe that they are enslaved by the phone. One of the respondents referring to the feeling of helplessness formulates even the question – “it is a kind of enslavement. I don’t want to use it anymore but what then?”. 2% of respondents indicate a limitation of real contacts as a result of telephone abuse, 1% admit that they were hit by a car as a result of inattentive use of the telephone, and the same number (1%) indicated that they were encouraged to have sexual activities on the telephone.

Young people were asked whether they had ever devoted too much attention and time to using a cell phone, and as a result their relationships with parents, siblings and other important people have deteriorated. 68% of respondents (282 people) state that they have not experienced any deterioration in their relationships with their parents, siblings and other important people. However, the data showing that every third respondent (133 respondents, which constitutes 32%) states that they have experienced this effect is disturbing. For this reason, young people were asked how many times in the last 6 months such a situation had occurred.

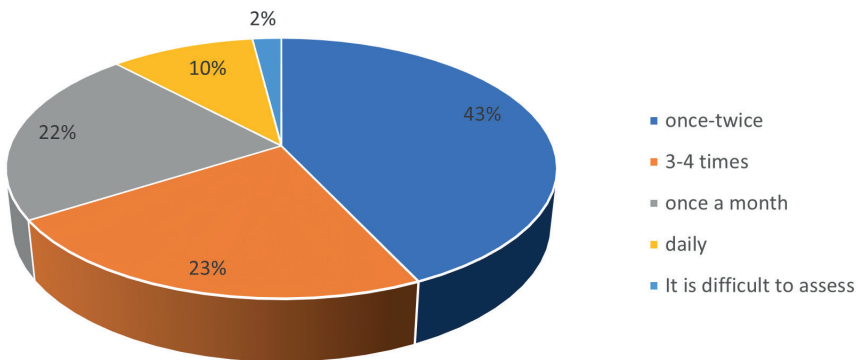


Chart 9. The frequency of disturbances in relationships with loved ones. Source: self-reported study.

Almost half of people who admitted that they experienced a deterioration in relations with their loved ones due to spending too much time on using a mobile phone (43%) assessed that such a situation took place once or twice in the last 6 months. 23% stated the occurrence of such circumstances 3-4 times in six months, and slightly less – because 22% once a month. Worryingly, 10% of respondents said they experience it every day. 2% of respondents were unable to assess it.

The adolescents were asked to indicate whether they perceived symptoms of excessive mobile phone use by their friends. Interesting data is shown in the chart below.

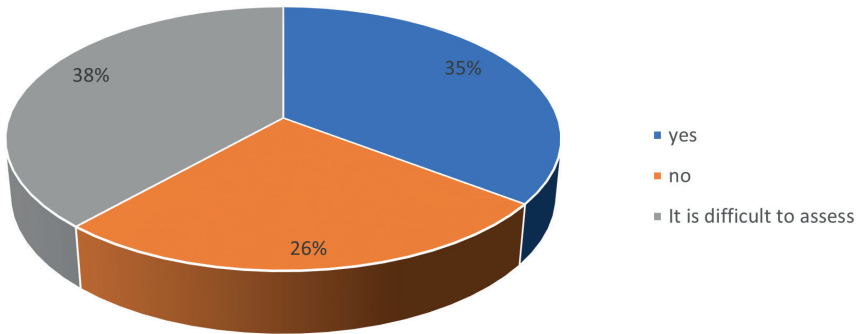


Chart 10. Noticing symptoms of addiction among acquaintances. Source: self-reported study.

38% of respondents admitted that it is difficult for them to assess whether the way their friends use a mobile phone shows the symptoms of addiction. That may be due to the insufficient knowledge on the subject. 35% assessed that they notice it, 26% denied it. When asked – how often – they answered: mostly sporadically (40%); often (26%); and very often (13%). Also, 13% of respondents indicated that they notice such situations rarely, 7.5% – very rarely.

In order to understand the issue more fully, young people were asked what actions do they take to prevent the smartphone addiction.

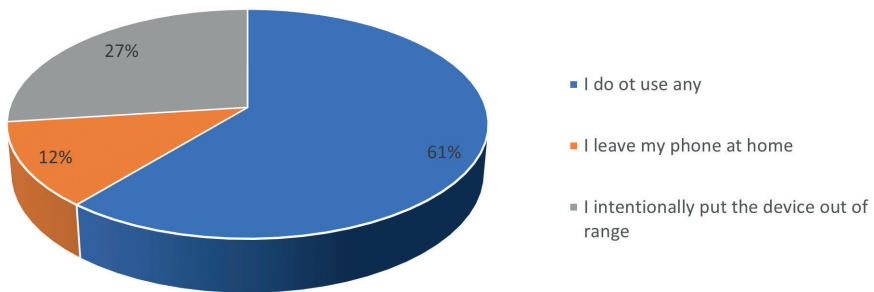


Chart 11. Preventive activities applied by young people. Source: self-reported study.

The data presented in Chart 11 clearly shows that the majority of respondents (61%) do not take any actions to prevent the addiction to a mobile phone. 27% of young people intentionally put their devices out of reach, and 12% leave their phone at home.

## DISCUSSION

It is difficult for young people to assess (32%) whether most of their contacts take place in the virtual or real world. This is probably due to the fact that the current epidemiological situation related to remote learning makes it necessary to transfer most of the relations to the Internet. The same group (32%) clearly finds these contacts to take place in the virtual world. It is also puzzling that 64% of the respondents clearly declare that if necessary, they would be able to function without a mobile phone, but it would be very difficult for them. 16.5% of young people are convinced that they cannot imagine a day without a phone.

Research on the risk of phonoholism has shown that the adolescents make use of wide range of phone applications mainly in order to communicate with other person. This is the one of the main (96%) activities indicated by young people for which a mobile phone is needed. The most commonly used by youth applications are: Messenger (94%); YouTube (81%); Instagram (74%); Facebook (60%), and Snapchat (53%). Additionally, it is worth noting that the aforementioned applications work through the Internet connection, and thus an increased amount of time spent on using a mobile phone.

On the basis of the studies carried out, it appears that 26% of respondents admits that they experience negative effects of using a mobile phone. Moreover, young people also notice these symptoms among their friends. It is also worth noting that they see these behaviours in others much more often than in themselves (35%). It is worrying that the vast majority of young people do not take any preventive measures (61%). Young people with interest enter the virtual world, wanting to get to know it, because it is created in such a way that it is attractive to recipients. This makes the adolescents succumb to its charm, not realizing its consequences. Moreover, the largest group of young people (51.5%) spends 4 hours or more on the phone every day. It should, therefore, be assumed that most of the free time after school is spent by young people using a mobile phone. This leads to both physical ailments, for instance, decreased vision, headache, general fatigue, sleep disturbances, as well as disturbances in mental functioning, such as the experience of cyberbullying, theft, encouragement to sexual activity, or aggression transferred to real-world relationships. It is worth emphasizing that among the respondents (3%) there are young people who clearly declare that they feel enslaved by a mobile phone which, for example, has put their lives at risk (being hit by a car).

All the data show clearly how urgent is the need to reflect on this phenomenon as well as to find very specific preventive measures. Prevention in this respect appears to be an urgent necessity of significant social importance. Since it is disturbing that the youngest patients of addiction treatment centres are only a few years old.

The conducted study constitutes an introduction to further observations and analyses, which shall have a broader and more in-depth character as far as the



surveyed group is concerned. Undoubtedly, in the near future, the observation of the described phenomenon will provide interesting data, due to the severity of the problem and the constantly growing number of people in whom the observed syndrome begins to hinder or prevent the correct fulfilling of their social roles.

## CONCLUSION

It is difficult for modern youth to imagine life without the use of a mobile phone, which often puts them at a risk of addiction. The aim of the presented research was an attempt to respond to the problem bothering many teachers, concerning the risk of phonoholism among secondary school students. The research has shown that adolescents do not detect the negative effects of using a mobile phone (addiction), but at the same time they declare that functioning without a telephone would be very difficult or even impossible for them. This is a serious signal that such a threat does occur to some extent and may increase over time, and eventually turn into an addiction. Moreover, further dynamic development of information technology and the emergence of newer and newer phone models on the market, directly requires caregivers to take decisive actions aimed at shaping the skills of rational and responsible use of mobile digital devices in the young generation. Therefore, it is worth indicating a few postulates that should be taken into account by parents, teachers and educators in the process of shaping the attitudes and behaviour of modern adolescents. The authors of the following article are convinced that the upbringing and education system of young generation should include:

- early identification and development of interests in children and adolescents, especially those related to physical activity (e.g. sport, tourism, recreation), social activity (e.g. voluntary work), artistic activity (e.g. dance, painting, theatre), giving young people an opportunity for personal expression and a valuable experience of reality together with and for the benefit of other people;
- in the process of school education, providing students with knowledge and shaping their competences in the field of proper and safe use of new digital media technologies in everyday life, while highlighting the ability to maintain balance and harmony between the real and virtual world;
- as part of various meetings and social campaigns aimed at adolescents; making young people aware of the nature and mechanisms of becoming dependent on mobile digital devices, as well as showing where they can seek effective help and support in crisis situations;
- closer cooperation between parents and teachers in the area of counteracting the risk of phonoholism, combined with carrying out an appropriate training for parents in dealing with their children's addiction to mobile phones and other mobile digital devices.

The above-mentioned postulates are only a general proposal that may become the basis for the development, by teachers and educators, of specific preventive and educational programs, adapted to particular environmental conditions of life of young people and their caregivers. The lack of clearly observed symptoms of phonoholism in adolescents does not release their guardians from preventive measures aimed at developing their personal potential, whilst sensitizing them to possible dangers and addictions related to the use of mobile digital devices.

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