# The family and ICT

Maja Ružić-Baf

Faculty of Educational Sciences, University Juraj Dobrila of Pula,
I.M.Ronjgova 1, 52100 Pula, Croatia
**E-mail adress: mruzic@unipu.hr**
**ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0155-4617**

Sandra Kadum

Faculty of Educational Sciences, University Juraj Dobrila of Pula,
I.M.Ronjgova 1, 52100 Pula, Croatia
**E-mail adress:kadumsandra@gmail.com**
**ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8441-0896**

Manuela Damić

Kindergarten Zirafa,
Nikole Cara 6,Rijeka, Croatia
**E-mail address: manuela.damic25@gmail.com**
**ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8159-2615**

## Abstract

**Aim.** In the last three to four decades, many technological changes have taken place that have affected the world, the family and the relationships between family members. In order to determine the impact of information and communication technology on the family and its members, and how much time the research participants spend using modern technology, a survey was conducted in which 160 respondents (parents) participated.

**Methods.** The research used a measuring instrument designed precisely for the purposes of this research. It consisted of three independent variables (gender, parental age and child's age) and nine dependent variables grouped into three sets: electronic media and time of their use, the impact of modern technology on family relationships and impact on the health of the children of the research participants. The Likert-type scale, adapted to the needs of this research, was used.

**Results.** The research results show: the respondents' answers regarding the variable of "How much time your child spends using information and communication technologies (ICT)" are statistically significant ($c^2 = 48.650$, $p < .000$); the correlation between the variables ("Gender" and "Do you talk to your children about the negative impact of ICT") is $r = .180$ and is significant at the .05 level; (3) the respondents' answers regarding the variable ("The knowledge of ICT in the early childhood is essential") are statistically

significant ($c^2 = 43.438$, $p < .000$); (4) the correlation between the variables ("The use of ICT affects family relationships" and "It affects the health of the child") is $r = .194$ and is significant at the .05 level.

**Conclusion.** Children no longer live under the constant supervision of their parents, but are given the freedom to develop, think and form opinions independently. As a result, they are increasingly left to different environmental influences.

**Keywords***:* family, family members, information and communication technology (ICT), time

## INTRODUCTION

At a young age, a child is most sensitive, just learning about the world and absorbing like a sponge. It is very important at this age to have support and adequate care of the family. Maja Ljubetić(2007)states that the family is a social unit that must provide the best conditions for the development of the child. It is important for the family to show that they support their child, to guide him and help him understand the reality. Tonči Trstenjak (2006) states that the family has a sensitive taskwhere the family becomes a place of constructive exchange in mutual love, attention, listening and sharing of feelings, thoughts and values, in relation to the media entering its life with its possibilities, contents, models and values and is open to the possibility that ICT becomes a meeting place or a place ofpainfuldisagreement and solitude.

Today, the question often arises as to how much ICT, i.e. the media, is involved in the upbringing of children, along with the family and some institutions. Zlatko Miliša, Mirela Tolić and Nenad Vertoušek (2009) believe that media and ICT have great power in directing youth activities. ICT influences children's development and thinking and communication with their environment. Today, ICT is affecting children as a manipulative tool, and it can be concluded that technology is today an essential factor that can play a greater role in upbringing than the family.

Considering that children today are surrounded by new devices in their home andfamily environments, the question arises, especially until the seventh year of the child's life, what behavioural modelsand beliefs the child will adopt by watching their parents and other people in his environment increasingly using new ICT, especially mobile and smart phones. Many parents are amazed, and often delighted, to learn that their child, who has not yet started walking, knows how to move his index finger across the screen of a device and some children already recognise the icon of a popular internet video sharing service and often run a cartoon or a video game located on the screen of the device.

In a study conducted by Daiga Kalnina and Armands Kalnins(2019)most of respondents (83%) were mothers, on the use of smartphones and tablets by their children between two and three years of age, the following research results were obtained: a total of 40% of children started playing with touch screens in their second year and 30% of children in the first year of life. A total

of 32% of children use the device almost daily, of which 16% of children use a smartphone daily. While playing with a smartphone or tablet, most children watch cartoons. While using a smartphone, 28% of children play video games, 72% watch cartoons on the YouTube web service, 88% view photos on a device, and 32% communicate with family using Skype.

A study conducted by Marie Bedrošová, Renata Hlavová, Hana Macháčková, Lenka Dědková, and David Šmahel(2018) found that only 11% of parents have control over their children's mobile phone content online, with only 10% of parents using parental control tools over the use of digital devices.

A survey (Cheung, Bedford, Urabain, Karmiloff-Smith, &Smith, 2017)found that 75% of respondents between six months and three years of age use touch screens on a daily basis. Of particular concern is the fact that younger children use technology and the time of use increases as they grow up, as the results of this research show. Children from six to eleven months of age, that is children younger than one year of age, use devices for an average of 8.53 minutes per day, while those aged 26 to 36 months use devices for an average of 45 minutes per day. Each additional hour of tablet use was associated with 15.6 minutes less sleep, an average of 26.4 minutes less sleep at night and 10.8 minutes more sleep during the day.

A study (The Nielesen, Company, 2017) conducted on a sample of 4646 respondents, parents of children aged six to twelve years, showed that 22% of parents buy their children their first cell phone at age of 10. Although the survey was conducted three years ago, it is possible to assume that today even younger children, and that is children as young as six, if not younger, have their own smartphone.

In a study conducted on a sample of 1017 children aged 9-17 in Croatia, HrKids Online (2017), preliminary data showed that children usually access the Internet through smart phones and computers/laptops/notebooks. Furthermore, one in four children between the ages of 9 and 14 and every third child between the ages of 15 and 17 iscompletely or mostly concerned about their privacy on the Internet. One in four children between the ages of 9 and 11 says that the claim "I know when I can and should not share information on the Internet"completely or mostly do not apply to them.

Unfortunately, one cannot function without ICT. Petra Robotić (2015)states that interactivity and greater communication opportunities offered by ICT, with many benefits and an interesting way of learning, pose a great risk to everyone, especially children. Children and young people today live significantly differently than their parents did and know much more about ICT, which makes the parenting role even more challenging and complex. According to Ivana Batarelo Kokić (2009) ICT has become an integral part of the lives of families and children in the 21st century, so it is justified to ask about their influence in families and in the upbringing of children.

Therefore, it is very important to learn how to use ICT properly and to know how to validate information and how to use it properly. It is of great importance to learn the ways of safetyon the Internet and social networks, data

protection and privacy, the use of *parental protection* tools that include content filtering and setting the inability to access certain websites or content. It is certainly important to inform your child about the rules of behaviour on the Internet.

The topic of addiction to information and communication technologies is nowadays increasingly the subject of research by many researchers in various fields of science. The question often arises when it is acceptable for a child to become familiar with technology and how much time a child should spend on a particular device.

American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) (AAP, 2006) recommends that children between the ages of three and five should not spend more than an hour a day in front of the screen and that the time they spend in front of the screen they should spend together with their parents to help them understand what they are watching. Screen exposure is not recommended for children under 18 months of age. For parents of 18-24 month olds who want to get their child acquainted with ICT, the recommendation is to use high quality programmed content to watch with their children. For children 6 years of age and older, time limits are set for using ICT, taking care not to interfere with adequate sleep, physical activity andother behaviour essential to health. It is also recommended to specify the time spent dining or driving without the use of media, as well as rooms in the home (such as bedrooms) where ICT is simply not allowed.

Too much time in front of the screen can indicate attention problems, and an increasingly sedentary lifestyle is an indicator of less and less movement, and this brings into question the obesity problem that younger children face. Furthermore, sleep disorders, vision problems, problems involving a certain space and proper ergonomic position while using ICT are just some of the problems that today's children and parents are increasingly facing.

## The role of ICT in the life of a child

The experiences that children pick up from the media are part of their daily lives. ICT does not act alone but operates through other groups and institutions, such as family, school, friends. Preschoolers already have access to a variety of information and communication technologies, such as TVs, laptops, computers, smartphones, tablets, etc.

The younger audience, as well as adults, are attracted to media that place entertainment and manipulative content. All of them are left to the ICT and do not search for critical texts, and more and more easier and more relaxing content is being sought by their readers, listeners, and viewers (Labaš & Marinčić, 2018).

According to statistics from the Henry Kaiser Family Foundation (Laniando & Pietra, 2004), a US-based family research institution, children from developed countries spend an average of 6 hours and 30 minutes each day in front of

some form of screen, be it television, a computer or asmart phone. Six hours may seem unthinkable, but children spend two hours in front of the TV, the next two hours on the Internet, either on a smartphone or a computer, and at best they spend two extra hours in front of a screen because of schoolwork. Also, Lana Ciboci and Igor Kanižaj(2011) state that the American Psychological Society has shown that a pre-school child will spend 4,000 hours in front of a television or other screen before leaving kindergarten. They further point out that in today's world, everyone lives a busy life, so most parents do not have time for their children, which means that children have greater access to ICT and the information they provide, and we can say that in today's world, ICTs take on the role of educators of children. Children are influenced (Sindik, 2012) not only by what is received through ICT, but also by the passivity of the environment in which children grow up (family, preschools, schools), and finally by their personal passivity and emotional and intellectual unpreparedness for life with the media.

Jenny S. Radesky and Dimitri A. Christakis (2016) point out that TV is on during child and parents communication. Overly frequent use of cell phones is associated with poorer verbal and non-verbal communication between parents and children and may be associated with more conflicts.

Thus, the use of ICT, especially for younger children, should primarily involve educating parents and then children. We are witnessing that children today know more than their parents, although it is often about learning faster, it is usually about learning by *trial and error*, and learning which is first and foremost superficial. Parents who are busy with work and the obligations that await them at home have very little time left for quality communication and socialising without ICT. In most families, leisure, free time and two-way face--to-face communication have been replaced by ICT. Children model parents and parents, to buy a few minutes of peace, give a small child an electronic device in its hands, without thinking about the possible consequences, which are often negative. Although ICT has many advantages, it is very important to preserve the family from its overuse, as the proverb says: *Ut sementem feceris ita metes* (as you sow, so shall you reap).

## Research

**The aim and tasks of research**

Information and communication technology (ICT) is so integrated into our lives that it is almost impossible to spend a day without using any of the modern technology devices. All technical achievements are networked with modern technology, and it is impossible to function without it today. ICT is so fascinating that some philosophers and writers compare it to magic. An example of such deliberation is the British writer Arthur C. Clarke who stated" "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." (New Scientist, 2020.)

The aim of the research was to determine the impact of ICT on family members, and how much time research participants (parents) spend using modern technology.

The following research task emerged from the aim thus defined:

- to determine what information and communication technology the research participants have and how much time they spend using it;
- to determine if the use of ICT affects family relationships;
- to determine if ICT affects their child's health.

**Measuring instrument**

The research used a measuring instrument designed precisely for the purposes of this research. It consisted of three independent variables (gender, parental age and child's age) and nine dependent variables grouped into three sets: electronic media and time of their use, the impact of modern technology on family relationships and impact on the health of the children of the research participants. The Likert-type scale, adapted to the needs of this research, was used. A response scale was offered with each item and the research participants decided on one of the offered answers, the one that best described their views and reflections.

**Research sample**

The sample consisted of 160 parents, of whom 29 (or 18.1%) were male and 131 (81.9%) were female. The data obtained are not that surprising given that mothers are more involved in child-rearing than fathers and are often more involved in duties and problems of parenting.

The characteristics of the sample with respect to the age of the study participants are shown in Table 1. It is noted that the largest number of research participants is aged "31 or more, but less than 36" (27.5%), while the smallest number is aged "41 or more, but less than 46" and"46 years or more": both 4.4%.

**Table 1.**
*The age of research participants*

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 25 or less | 32 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 |
| more than 25, but less than 31 years | 42 | 26.3 | 26.3 | 46.3 |
| 31 or more, but less than 36 years | 44 | 27.5 | 27.5 | 73.8 |
| 36 or more, but less than 41 years | 28 | 17.5 | 17.5 | 91.3 |
| 41 or more, but less than 46 years | 7 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 95.6 |
| 46 or more year | 7 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 100.0 |
| Total | 160 | 100.0 | | 100.0 |

Source: Own elaboration

To determine whether there were statistically significant differences regarding the normal distribution of study participants with respect to age, we applied the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The results obtained are shown in Table 2.

Table 2.
*Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality of distribution with respect to the variable age.*

| | Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a] | | | Shapiro-Wilk | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Statistic | df | Sig. | Statistic | df | Sig. |
| age | .173 | 160 | .000 | .908 | 160 | .000 |

*a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 2. shows that the significance is less than .05 and the deviation from normality is not statistically significant i.e. the significance is in this case $p$ = .000 < .05, which means that the normality of the distribution is confirmed and therefore accepted as such.

The research participants also stated their child's age. The results obtained are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.**
*The age of children of research participants*

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| two (2) years | 12 | 7.5 | 7.5 | 7.5 |
| three (3) years | 23 | 14.4 | 14.4 | 21.9 |
| four (4) years | 50 | 31.3 | 31.3 | 53.1 |
| five (5) years | 33 | 20.6 | 20.6 | 73.8 |
| six (6) years | 39 | 24.4 | 24.4 | 98.1 |
| seven (7) years | 2 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 99.4 |
| eight (8) years | 1 | .6 | .6 | 100.0 |
| Total | 160 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Source: Own elaboration

The Table 3. shows that the largest number of children of research participants are four years of age (31.3%), followed by children of six years of age, 24.4%, while at least there are those of eight years: only one i.e. .6%.

## Results and discussion

On looking at the data (obtained through the research) and the results (obtained by processing this data), we focused towards the aim of this research to determine the impact of information and communication technology on family members, and how much time research participants (parents) spend using ICT(Kadum-Bošnjak, Cotič, & Felda,2014).

The first research task was about determination what information and communication technology the research participants have and how much time they spend using it.

The first item within the first research tasks related to the possession of information and communication technology. Participants were given the possibility to mark multiple answers. The obtained results are shown in Figure 1.

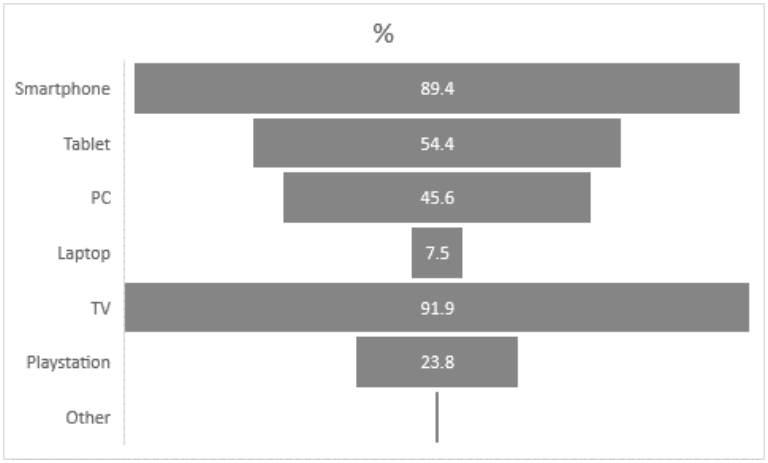


**Figure 1.**
*Possession of information and communication technology*
Source: Own elaboration

Figure 1. shows that, in terms of possession of electronic devices, TV and smartphone dominate, while the laptop is at least present in families. Only .6% chose the possible answer none of the above.

With this variable we were interested in "How much time do you spend using electronic media" Most respondents (41.9%) stated that they use ICT on

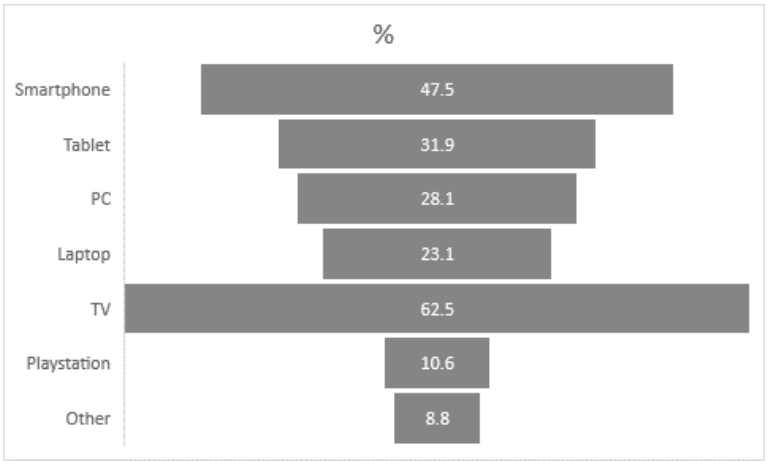


**Figure 2.**
*Which ICTs are your kids active users of?*
Source: Own elaboration

average for three (3) hours a day and 31.3% of them use these media for two (2) hours a day. 4.4% of respondents use information and communication technology seven and more than seven hours a day.

ICTs are your kids active users of. Respondents were given the possibility to give more answers." The obtained data are shown in Figure 2. It is noted that the children of the respondents most often use the TV, then the smartphone, while they least actively use PlayStation. Nensi Blažević (2012) states that children are often alone in front of the television, and if they watch shows with their parents, then they do not discuss the contents of them at all. As children are quite adept at operating the TV at a very young age, they often choose what to watch, which is not always the best choice.

In this variable we wanted to examine "How much time do your children spend using ICT ". Most respondents stated that their child actively uses ICT for an average of two (2) hours per day, while 26.9% of them use these media less than one hour. The following values were obtained by statistical data processing: arithmetic mean M = 2.08, standard deviation s = .876 and chi-square $c^2(3, N = 160) = 48.650$, $p < .000$. Considering the obtained chi-square and the related significance, the answers of the respondents differ with statistical significance.

The last item in the first research task that the research participants commented on was: "Do you talk to your children about the negative impact of ICT?" The data obtained show that 53.8% of respondents often talk about the negative impact of ICT with their children, slightly less than one quarter (23.1%) rarely discuss it, while 8.1% never talk to their children about its harmful effects. In addition to the above item, we were interested in the correlation of the data obtained with respect to the gender of the respondents. The correlation between the independent variable Gender and the dependent variable (item) Do you talk to your children about the negative impact of ICT? is r = .180, with Sig. (2-tailed) = .023 and it is significant at the .05 level.

The second research taskfocused on the impact of ICT on family relationships.

The first item the research participants declared themselves on was: The use of ICT affects family relationships. 39.4% of the respondents could not express their opinion about the set item i.e. they neither agree nor disagree with the set item; 21.9% of them generally disagree with the set item. Almost one-fourth of the respondents (23.8%) completely agree with the set item (10.0%), i.e. they mostly agree (13.8%).

The next item within the second research task that the research participants declared themselves on was: Knowledge of ICT in early childhood is essential. 18.8% of respondents generally agree with this definition, while 16.9% completely agree. The largest number of respondents (33.8%) could not express themselves about the set item, i.e. they neither agree nor disagree with the set item. The resulting responses have undergone statistical verification. We have obtained the following values: $c^2(4, N = 160) = 43.438$, $p < .000$. Considering the obtained chi-square and its associated significance,

it is concluded that the answers of the research participants are statistically significant.

The third research taskwas about determining the impact of ICT on a child's health. Two items were included in this research task: the first, ICT affects the health of my child and the second children should have access to education on the proper use of ICT.

The opinion about the first item was as follows: completely agree 8.8%, mostly agree 11.3%, while with the set item particle generally disagree 25.6 % i.e. completely disagree 19.4%. More than one third of respondents (35.0%) neither agree nor disagree with the set item.

The results of the statement on the second item of the third research task show: more than 3/4 of the respondents with the set item completely disagree (53.8%), i.e. they mostly disagree (22.5%). Only 6.2% of the research participants completely agree (3.1%) or mostly agree, also 3.1%, with the set item; 17.5% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree with the item.

For items from the second and those from the third research task, a correlation was sought. The obtained data are shown in Table 4. It is evident that there is a statistical relationship only between items: The use of ICT affects family relationships and ICT affects the health of the child. This correlation is r = .194 and is statistically significant at the .05 level.

**Table 4.**
*Correlation between items from the second and third research tasks*

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The use of ICTs affects family relationships | Pearson Correlation | 1 | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | | | |
| | N | 160 | | | |
| Knowledge of ICT in early childhood is essential | Pearson Correlation | .056 | 1 | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .481 | | | |
| | N | 160 | 160 | | |
| ICT affects the health of the child | Pearson Correlation | .194* | .027 | 1 | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .014 | .735 | | |
| | N | 160 | 160 | 160 | |
| Children should have access to education on the proper use of ICT. | Pearson Correlation | .052 | .094 | -.133 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .510 | .237 | .094 | |
| | N | 160 | 160 | 160 | 160 |

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: own elaboration

Arithmetic means and standard deviations were determined for the indicated items from the second and third research tasks (Table 5). It is noted that all four arithmetic means are relatively high and the highest is the one related to the item children should have access to education on the proper use of ICT, which is 4.21 (with the least variability i.e. deviations from the arithmetic

mean SD = 1.041). This means that 84.2% of the respondents think that children should have access to education on the proper use of ICT.

**Table 5.**
*Descriptive statistics for items from the second and third research tasks*

| Statement | Min. | Max. | *M* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Using ICTs is affecting relationships in my family. | 1 | 5 | 3.18 | 1.154 |
| Knowledge of ICT in early childhood is important nowadays. | 1 | 5 | 3.06 | 1.282 |
| ICT affects my child's health. | 1 | 5 | 3.36 | 1.173 |
| Children should have access to education on the proper use of ICT | 1 | 5 | **4.21** | 1.041 |

Source: Own elaboration

## Conclusion

Information and communication technology has an impact on all spheres of society, including the family, which has changed as a basic structure of society, influenced by modern technologies. The role of parents has also changed: the mother is no longer the one who stays home and looks after the children, but builds her professional career. Children no longer live under the constant supervision of their parents, but are given the freedom to develop, think and form opinions independently. As a result, they are increasingly left exposed to different environmental influences.

Due to the increasingly accelerated lifestyle, more and more families, especially young families, are influenced by modern ICT. One of the requirements of the use of ICT is that a person speeds up certain work processes while gaining on time, that is, he or she has more and more free time. However, unfortunately, in many individuals, modern technology has done just the opposite.

Children at a young age become *servants* or *victims* of ICT. Since they have been surrounded by different devices since birth, recently mostly by mobile phones and smartphones, which are at first *at eye reach* of babies and later *at hand reach* of toddlers in their primary environment – the family as the most important and primary factor in the socialization of the child and overall psychophysical development, the question of the importance of the role of the parents is raised. Therefore, it is often the case that the child lacks someone to advise him or her.

In a sea of change, ICT is a tool that makes our lives easier. It is almost impossible to function without some of the modern devices. In addition to helping us inform, educate and entertain, it also builds some attitudes, values and thoughts. ICT affects both the youngest and the oldest and their relationships with each other. In today's world where everyone is living an accelerated lifestyle, more and more parents are leaving their children to the media and media education. Today, every person spends most of his or her free time

using some of the modern ICT and thus its influence is great. There is a growing need (Šimović & Ružić-Baf, 2013) for computers, ICT and Information Systems (IS) and for increased ethical action related to issues and standards related to modern computer use, ICT and ICS (Information and communication systems). At the same time, most of the new problems are related to the preservation of: privacy, precision and accuracy of information; ownership of information; free and responsible access to information; adequate privacy of persons, groups and legal entities.

ICT often manipulates people, and reality is shaped as they determine it. Of course, ICT has not only the negative side, there is also the positive side, which is good to know and use properly to bring about the positive impact of modern technology toparents and children, and ultimately on the whole family.

Too much time in front of the screen can indicate attention problems and an increasingly sedentary lifestyle is an indicator of less and less movement, and this brings into question the obesity problem that younger children face. Furthermore, sleep disorders, vision problems, problems involving a certain space and proper ergonomic position while using ICT are just some of the problems that today's children and parents are increasingly facing.

In our opinion, children should be allowed to use ICT as late as possible, definitely not before the age of seven and primarily for educational purposes through play, to use it in the presence of adults, parents, teachers who have previously been educated and are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of its use. Therefore, since addiction is an increasingly occurring concept and we have been witnessing the opening of more and more clinics that specialised in the treatment of such addictions in which children, teens and young people are treated, we consider it wise to open more educational and counselling centres, both in major cities and in smaller communities, which should be completely free of charge.

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