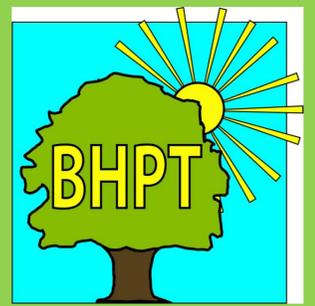


A study into the impact of young people's use of screen based devices (SBDs) - with particular reference to positive and negative effects on mental health and personal wellbeing



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Introduction

In March 2016, Burnham Health Promotion Trust (BHPT) undertook a study into young peoples' use of screen based devices (SBDs) with reference to age, gender and school type. Other studies^{1,2} had reported negative effects on young people's mental wellbeing. Our aim was to assess the ways in which students used their SBDs and, the impact on their mental health³ and wellbeing.

BHPT is an independent Public Health charity with a tradition of undertaking local research into issues affecting young people. Previous areas of study have included Recreation (2002), Sex Education (2005) and Youth Health (2007).

Method

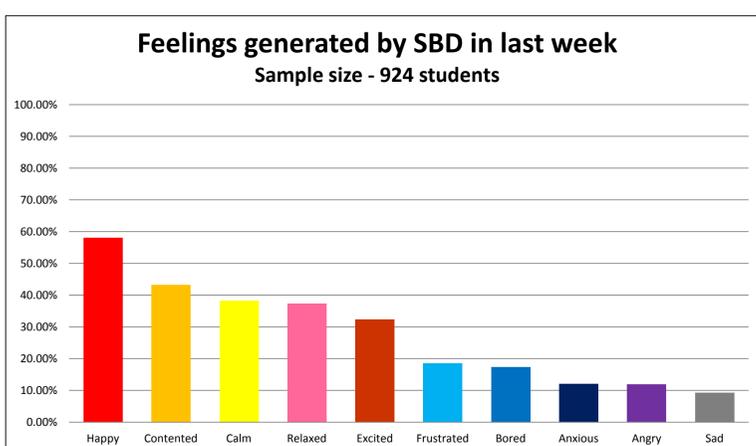
Whole school surveys were completed by 1041 students in March 2016 in two neighbouring but contrasting secondary schools, (School X - a mixed grammar school and School Y - a mixed non-selective school). The surveys were completed during class time.

The survey consisted of 43 questions and topics covered fell into one of three categories:

- Student background information e.g. Demographic, Social and Personal Health Behaviour criteria e.g. household size, sleep, exercise levels
- Students' use of devices - what, when, why, how
- Impact on students of use of device/s: physical aspects of daily routine, impact/consequences on emotional states and cognitive functioning.

Results

85% of students experienced more positive feelings than negative feelings. There were clear differences between the schools, genders and ages.

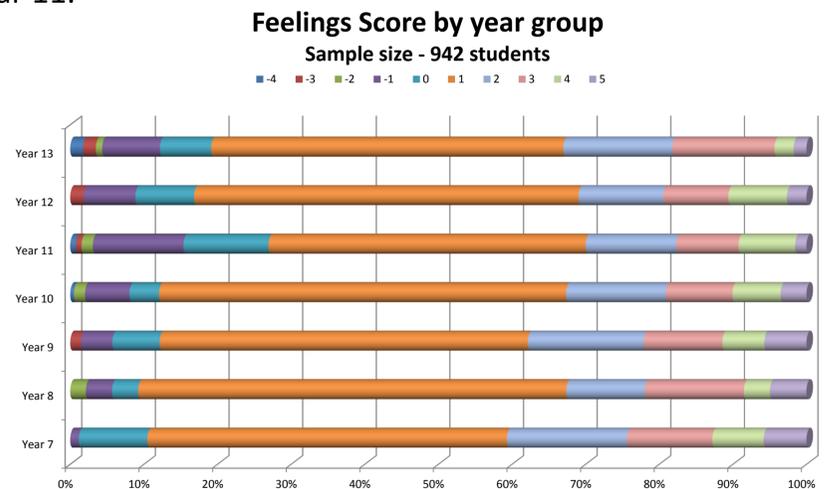


- Girls generally experienced more negative feelings than boys.
- A higher percentage of School Y (non-selective) students experienced more negative feelings.
- Older students at both schools experienced more negative feelings.

References

¹ "Screened Out - Meeting the challenge of technology and young people's wellbeing" The Strategic Society Centre, Gordon Cameron & James Lloyd, Oct 2015
<http://strategicsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Screened-Out-Meeting-the-challenge-of-technology-and-young-peoples-wellbeing.pdf>

- At both schools students' experiences were the least positive in Year 11.



'Feelings Score' calculated by giving +1 for each positive feeling and -1 for each negative feeling generated by SBD.

Other findings included:

- Over 25% of students had experienced online bullying or harassment.
- Over 40% of girls had received inappropriate messages or photos from strangers.
- Over 25% of students knew someone who had been affected by extremist content/radicalism.
- 50% of students said "Face to face in person" was their favourite means of communicating with friends but 25% did not rank "face to face" within their top three communication methods.
- Only 15% of Year 11 students had 9 hours sleep a night, the NHS recommended amount for 16 year olds.
- 17% of students never took part in sport or energetic exercise out of school, up 12% from a previous BHPT study carried out in 2007 when only 5% did not partake in energetic exercise.



- 9% of students did not have anyone to talk to if they were worried about something online. A further 8% were unsure if they did.

Discussion

The findings have significant implications for the mental health of young people. SBDs are a resource but like all resources must be managed and used with care and control. Poor control of SBDs being associated with disturbed sleep patterns, loss of physical exercise opportunity, and the negative affective impact of inappropriate and unwanted content.

The survey found many similarities and important differences in the ways students of different ages and schools used and felt about their devices. The dynamic impact of SBDs warrants continuing study.

² "Measuring National Wellbeing: Insights into children's health and wellbeing", Office for National Statistics, Oct 2015

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/measuringnationalwellbeing/2015-10-20>

³ "Mental health: strengthening our response" World Health Organisation Factsheet updated April 2016 <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs220/en/>