



Bibliotherapy in the Prevention of Digital Addiction Among Children and Young People ***Biblioterapia w profilaktyce uzależnień cyfrowych dzieci i młodzieży***

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The aim of the article is to show the possibilities of using bibliotherapy in programs for the prevention of digital addictions addressed to children and adolescents.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The method used in research was the analysis of source material contained in the documentation of preventive programs implemented in the Municipal Public Library in Pysznica. Answers were sought to the following questions: What children's and youth literature was used during bibliotherapeutic sessions? What issues did it concern? What additional techniques and forms of influence, apart from bibliotherapy, were used in regard to the participants?

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The article presents bibliotherapy as one of the art therapy techniques and discusses the possibilities of its application in preventive programs for children and youth, using the example of the Municipal Public Library in Pysznica.

RESEARCH RESULTS: The literature, depicting the problem of safe use of the Internet and the risks of excessive activity in the virtual world, was used in the preventive programmes. Except for the bibliotherapy, other art therapy techniques, such as plastic therapy, music therapy and film therapy were also used.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPLICABLE VALUE OF RESEARCH: Bibliotherapy can be an attractive form of preventing digital addictions among children and adolescents and the passion of reading can become an alternative to excessive activity in the virtual world.

→ **KEYWORDS:** **BIBLIOTHERAPY, ART THERAPY TECHNIQUES, NETWORK ADDICTION, PREVENTIVE PROGRAMS, CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH LITERATURE**

STRESZCZENIE

CEL NAUKOWY: Celem artykułu jest ukazanie możliwości stosowania biblioterapii w programach z zakresu profilaktyki uzależnień cyfrowych kierowanych do dzieci i młodzieży.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Zastosowaną metodą była analiza materiału źródłowego zawartego w dokumentacji programów profilaktycznych realizowanych w Gminnej Bibliotece Publicznej w Pysznicy. Poszukiwano odpowiedzi na pytania: Jaką literaturę dziecięcą i młodzieżową wykorzystano w ramach warsztatów biblioterapeutycznych? Jakich dotyczyła ona problemów? Jakie, oprócz biblioterapii, zastosowano dodatkowe techniki i formy oddziaływań względem uczestników?

PROCES WYWODU: W artykule ukazano biblioterapię jako jedną z technik arteterapii oraz omówiono możliwości jej zastosowania w programach profilaktycznych dla dzieci i młodzieży na przykładzie Gminnej Biblioteki Publicznej w Pysznicy.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: W programach profilaktycznych wykorzystano literaturę ukazującą problem bezpiecznego korzystania z Internetu oraz zagrożeń związanych z nadmierną aktywnością w wirtualnym świecie. Oprócz biblioterapii stosowano także inne techniki arteterapii, tj. plastykoterapię, muzykoterapię oraz filmoterapię.

WNIOSKI, REKOMENDACJE I APLIKACYJNE ZNACZENIE WPŁYWU BADAŃ: Biblioterapia może być atrakcyjną formą profilaktyki uzależnień cyfrowych wśród dzieci i młodzieży, a rozbudzone pasje czytelnicze mogą stać się alternatywą dla nadmiernej aktywności w wirtualnym świecie.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** **BIBLIOTERAPIA, TECHNIKI ARTETERAPII, UZALEŻNIENIA CYFROWE, PROGRAMY PROFILAKTYCZNE, LITERATURA DZIECIĘCA I MŁODZIEŻOWA**

Introduction

Bibliotherapy is one of many art therapy techniques (also known as art therapy) that uses artistic creation (one's own or that of others) to improve well-being and support mental health. The objective of art therapy (including bibliotherapy) is, in general terms, to release or calm emotions, restore harmony and emotional balance, or manage emotional arousal (Szczerska, 2020, p. 67). As part of art therapy, various techniques are distinguished (taking into account the means of artistic expression), including, for example, visual art therapy (therapy through visual arts), music therapy (therapy through music), choreotherapy (therapy through dance and movement), theatre therapy (therapy through participation, including active participation, in theatre performances), play therapy (therapy through games and play) and bibliotherapy (therapy through literature) (Kuciapiński, 2013, pp. 25–28). Various forms of art therapy are extensively used in educational institutions (schools), medical institutions (health care establishments) and care establishments (e.g. residential care homes) etc., and are used in therapeutic work with

different age groups (i.e. children and young people, adults, seniors), as well as with people experiencing various problems, e.g. those addicted to psychoactive substances (Papaj, 2010, p. 267). Art therapy can also be used in the prevention of addictions, including digital addictions (also known as compulsive Internet use or cyber addiction), which specifically include addiction to the Internet, smartphones, social media, and online games (Wawryk et al., 2024, p. 39).

The objective of this article is to present the possibilities of implementing bibliotherapy in projects aimed at preventing digital addiction among children and young people. This issue will be discussed on the basis of two original projects carried out at the Rural Municipal Public Library in Pysznica over the years 2023–2024. The source material contained in the documentation of the projects entitled 'Passion Instead of Addictions' and 'I Choose Dreams, Not Addictions' was analysed (GBP w Pysznicy, 2023, 2024). A complementary source of information was provided by informal interviews conducted with people who carried out bibliotherapy classes with young people.

Bibliotherapy – Its Objectives and Types

Bibliotherapy, also referred to as reading therapy, has been used for years in working with various age groups and with people struggling with specific problems or diseases, exhibiting behavioural disorders, at risk of exclusion, as well as with fully healthy individuals. (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1993, pp. 23–24). The main objective of bibliotherapy is to support its recipients in overcoming various life difficulties and improving their quality of life. The literature distinguishes four fundamental objectives of bibliotherapy: re-validation, social rehabilitation, general development and prevention (Konieczna, 2010, pp. 14–15). Depending on the needs and situation of the individual, bibliotherapy can serve various tasks, including, e.g., facilitating the expression of emotions (positive and negative), strengthening self-esteem, alleviating stress, and helping to accept one's own life situation. It is also helpful in the process of personal development, as it encourages creativity and shapes the imagination, enables individuals to identify their own desires and needs, and allows them to express their inner world of experiences. It is also used to counteract various types of disorders and prevent the development of difficult situations, including those related to the development of addictions (Cyrklaff, 2014b, p. 83; Świderek & Kierzkowska, 2022, p. 56).

Bibliotherapy (Greek: *biblion* – a book, *therapeia* – treatment) involves the use of books (e.g. novels, fairy tales, poetry) in the process of therapeutic (healing) influence on the recipient (reader) in order to stimulate their emotional development, enrich their imagination, encourage skilful coping with emotions, strengthen self-confidence and the belief in their ability to cope with various problems and setbacks (Czernianin, 2017, p. 17; Kucharzewska, 2021, pp. 76–77). The primary tool in the bibliotherapy process is the written word, books (e.g. young adult novels, adult novels, children's stories, poetry), and its impact on the recipient takes place through reading or listening to the whole or

parts of books, either alone or with others, including watching and listening to adaptations of literary works (Kucharzewska, 2021, p. 76).

There are various types of bibliotherapy distinguished in the source literature. On the one hand, bibliotherapy can be informal, when a person reaches for a book on their own and searches for answers to their fears or problems, and on the other hand, it can be fully formal and structured, when reading a given book is recommended by a qualified professional (e.g. a therapist, social worker, librarian), and the content of the recommended reading has a specific therapeutic value for the person concerned (Fanner & Urquhart, 2008, p. 238). Bibliotherapy is also divided into institutional, clinical and developmental. The first type, mainly carried out by physicians (e.g. psychiatrists), is used in healthcare establishments (e.g. psychiatric hospitals). Its fundamental objective is to enable patients to understand the specific nature of their disease and the problems associated with it by providing literature with relaxing content. Clinical bibliotherapy can be used both in closed establishments and in an open environment. It is conducted by therapists and targeted at people exhibiting emotional and behavioural disorders. Developmental bibliotherapy (also referred to as educational bibliotherapy) can be implemented in schools, community centres, libraries, etc. It is used for people who are generally healthy but have specific issues to resolve, and its objective is to support the development and self-fulfilment of the individual. This type of bibliotherapy can be conducted by therapists, teachers and educators, social workers, personal advisors and librarians (Kruszewski, 2006, p. 59; Cyrklaff, 2014a, pp. 135–136).

Within bibliotherapy, poetry therapy is also distinguished, which is based on the use of lyrical texts, e.g. poems or song lyrics (Cyrklaff, 2015, p. 143). Meanwhile, film therapy is an audiovisual form of bibliotherapy that uses various types of films: feature films (including adaptations of literary works), documentaries, animated films, etc. (Konieczna, 2010, p. 13; Cyrklaff, 2015, p. 144).

The role of bibliotherapy is to strengthen the recipient's comprehension of the world and its problems, other people, and themselves. Targeted reading can become a starting point for reflection on one's own life situation, on how to help oneself or find one's place in a new, difficult situation, such as disease, adaptation difficulties in a new place, school, etc. The therapeutic effect of literature consists in strengthening the reader's self-esteem, acquiring the ability to cope with aggression and stress, and overcoming the tendency to addictions (Kucharzewska, 2021, p. 77).

Possibilities of Using Bibliotherapy in the Prevention of Digital Addiction as Exemplified by the Rural Municipal Public Library in Pysznica

Nowadays, libraries are the venue for a number of initiatives that go beyond their traditional role as 'book lending libraries.' They conduct cultural and educational activities in the broadest sense: organise exhibitions, meetings with authors, fairs, workshops, etc.

The contemporary library is becoming a culture-making place that integrates different groups of readers. It is becoming a place of integration, activation and social inclusion, firmly embedded in the local community (Działek & Murzyn-Kupisz, 2014, pp. 11–12). One of the increasingly common forms of library activity is becoming bibliotherapy. It is most often carried out in public and educational libraries, as well as in school libraries. It is mostly developmental bibliotherapy, aimed at children and young people, based on cooperation with kindergartens and schools (Bienia, 2019, p. 5; Kucharzewska, 2021, pp. 83–84).

The Rural Municipal Public Library in Pysznica (hereinafter referred to as the RMPL in Pysznica) is a library operating in a rural environment. Its tasks, apart from collecting and making available library collections and promoting reading among the residents of the municipality, also include conducting information and educational activities, organising various forms of work with readers, and developing and satisfying the educational and cultural needs of the municipal community, in cooperation with local institutions (Statut..., 2016, § 6.1. [Statute of the Rural Municipal Public Library in Pysznica]).

In the years 2023–2024, two preventive projects addressed to school-age children and young people were implemented at the RMPL in Pysznica. Their objective was to counteract cyber addiction (compulsive Internet use, phone addiction), and the measures taken were aimed at developing the personal and interpersonal skills of the participants, necessary for satisfactory functioning in the real world, including in peer groups, and promoting alternative forms of leisure activities (GBP w Pysznicy, 2023, 2024). The classes were conducted by two employees of the RMPL who had completed a course in bibliotherapy (including one with a degree in pedagogy). The programmes implemented were original projects that did not meet the standards of professional addiction prevention. Their documentation did not contain information on the level of prevention (i.e. universal, selective, indicative) or the evaluation methods used to assess their effectiveness (cf. Piasecka, 2023, p. 17).

In 2023, students from the second grade of the John Paul II Public Primary School in Pysznica were participants in a project under the name 'Passion Instead of Addiction'. Between February and June 2023, a series of five classes entitled 'Digital Detox' was held at the RMPL premises in Pysznica (classes were held once a month).

During the first meeting, participants listened to an excerpt from the book *Wiewiórczy z@kątek (Squirrel N@ck of the Woods)* by Adam Studziński (2019). It is 'a story about social media.' It talks about how they can be used to change the world for the better, but also how their improper use can lead to serious trouble (publisher's description). Having listened to the story, the children took part in a discussion about ways of spending their free time, talked about their interests, and then made artworks (drawings) showing their passions and interests.

The subject area of the subsequent classes concerned addiction to the Internet, smartphones, and computer games. Participants listened to another excerpt from the book by A. Studziński, and then watched a cartoon film developed by the Polish Safer Internet Centre, entitled *3...2...1... Internet! Addiction Part 1* (Polskie Centrum Programu

Safer Internet, n.d.). which highlights the problem of addiction to computer games. On the occasion of the upcoming Easter holidays, the children also made Easter decorations (bunnies and chickens) from recycled materials.

The through line of the next class in the 'Digital Detox' series was good manners, or savoir vivre on social media. Participants listened to the story: *Kto się kryje za Marsem, czyli kilka słów o hejtowaniu* (*Who is hiding behind Mars, or a few words about hate speech*), from the book by Zofia Staniszevska (2022), entitled *Dzieci w sieci, czyli dobre maniere w internecie* (*Children on the Internet, or good manners on the Internet*), and the story E-mail from the collection entitled *Bon czy ton. Savoir-vivre dla dzieci* (*Bon or Tone. Savoir-vivre for Children*) by Grzegorz Kasdepke (2011). The subject area of the class was the culture of expression in everyday life, including social media. The discussion was accompanied by art and craft activities in the form of colourful vases made from recycled materials (jars and bottles).

The next but three preventive class was devoted to the issue of sharing personal data on the Internet. The children had the opportunity to learn what 'personal data' is and how it should be used, based on an excerpt from the book *Wiewiórczy z@kątek* (*Squirrel N@ck of the Woods*) by A. Studziński. Upon listening to the story, the participants created artistic collages depicting their passions and interests, which they pursue in their free time and which are an alternative to using a computer or smartphone.

The last meeting was intended to summarise the entire series of 'Digital Detox' classes. A discussion was initiated on what the pupils had learned and remembered during the bibliotherapy classes. The children also completed a 'Test for a lady and a gentleman, that is, a conscious user of social media' prepared by the employees of the library. Afterwards, the participants created artworks by covering cardboard boards with colourful recycled bottle caps. They portrayed gardens and nature in the locality of Pysznica. Both the subject matter of the works and the materials used to create them were intended to draw participants' attention to the issue of ecology and the possibilities of using recycled materials. At the end of the class, the children received certificates of 'conscious social media users.'

In 2024, another prevention project entitled 'I Choose Dreams, not Addictions' was implemented, which included a series of classes entitled: 'Just Slow Down! Say No to Insidious Addictions'. The classes, held between April and June, were targeted at various age groups and attended by students in 2nd to 6th grades at the Public Primary School in Pysznica.

The participants of the first class were children from the second grades. The students listened to an excerpt from the book entitled *Wszystko dla lajków? Powiedz STOP fikcji w internecie* (*Everything for Likes? Say STOP to Fiction on the Internet*) by Jennifer Moore-Mallinos (2022). The keynote of the book is the problem of young Internet users seeking to improve their 'media image.' Using the example of the book's protagonist, who 'tries to take the perfect selfie but is still dissatisfied with the end result' (publisher's description), children had the opportunity to learn that not all social media users are sincere and honest, and that the person behind a given photo is not always real. During the second part of the meeting, the children made mini gardens from recycled materials

(egg cartons), in which they sowed vegetable and flower seeds. The children took their 'gardens' home to look after the plants themselves.

During subsequent bibliotherapy classes, attended by fifth-grade students, an excerpt from the book entitled *Komputerowy ćpun 2.0 (Computer Junkie 2.0)* by Krzysztof Piersa was used (2021). Based on the reading, participants found out: 'where the line between entertainment and addiction lies,' 'what the consequences of abuse are and, most importantly, how to deal with this issue' (from the publisher's description). The second part of the class used art and music therapy techniques. The children were assigned the task of colouring mandalas while listening to relaxing music. According to the authors of the class, this exercise required concentration and patience, and the accompanying relaxing music helped calm emotions and stimulate creativity.

Classes addressing the dangers of drug use were aimed at third-year students. The classes included reading the story entitled *Oblawa (The Manhunt)* by Grzegorz Kasdepke (2017) from the book named *Mam prawo! Czyli nieomal wszystko, co powinniście wiedzieć o prawach dziecka, a nie macie kogo zapytać (I Have the Right! That Is, Almost Everything you Should Know About Children's Rights, but Have No One to Ask About)*. In the practical part of the class, students made colorful houses from recycled materials, which were displayed in an exhibition in the library.

During the fourth meeting, the young participants (fourth-grade students) listened to a story entitled *Żółty berecik (The Yellow Small Beret)* from the book under the title *Bajkoterapia, czyli bajki-pomagajki dla małych i dużych (Fairy Tale Therapy, or Helpful Fairy Tales for Young and Old)* by Rokšana Jędrzejewska-Wróbel (2022). Reading about safe use of the Internet when making friends with other Internet users became the basis for a discussion on how to behave towards people who try to contact us in the virtual network. After the discussion, the children took part in manual and art classes and prepared their own bookmarks.

The last in a series of bibliotherapy classes was addressed to sixth-grade students, during which an excerpt from the book by Krzysztof Piersa (2023) entitled *Złota rybka w szambie. Jak pokonać uzależnienie od smartfona i Internetu (The Goldfish in the Septic Tank: How to Overcome Smartphone and Internet Addiction)* was used. The reading formed the basis for a discussion on addiction, during which the brainstorming method was employed. Participants had to come up with ways of dealing with addiction to electronic media. In the second part of the class, as part of visual art therapy, students painted colourful glass stained-glass windows. The objective of these classes was not only relaxation, but also to make participants aware that manual work can be an interesting alternative to excessive activity in the virtual world.

Conclusions and Summary

In the search for effective methods of addiction prevention for children and young people, it is worth paying attention to the method of bibliotherapy. Preventive activities aimed

at this age group should engage participants in an interesting and attractive manner. Reading a book can fulfil this role, as it allows the reader to identify with the protagonist and, in a sense, vicariously experience the problems they face. Such identification can lead to a change in undesirable behaviours and the formation of positive patterns of behaviour, especially when, thanks to a happy ending, the reader begins to believe in a successful solution to their own problems as well (cf. Sufa & Janas, 2018, p. 423).

The objective of the prevention projects implemented at the RMPL in Pysznica in 2023 and 2024, targeting school-age children and young people, was to increase awareness of digital risks and promote alternative forms of leisure activities to those involving the Internet. The main method used in these programmes was bibliotherapy, which was additionally combined with other art therapy techniques (such as visual art therapy, film therapy, music therapy) and environmental education.

The subject area of the classes based on reading books referred to:

- rules for safe use of the Internet (*Wiewiórczy z@kątek [Squirrel N@ck of the Woods]* by A. Studziński),
- establishing contacts and making friends on social media (*Wiewiórczy z@kątek [Squirrel N@ck of the Woods]* by A. Studziński; *Żółty berecik [The Yellow Small Beret]* by R. Jędrzejewska-Wróbel),
- hate speech and the rules of proper communication on the Internet (*Dzieci w sieci, czyli dobre maniery w Internecie [Children on the Internet, or Good Manners on the Internet]* by Z. Staniszevska; *Bon czy ton. Savoir-vivre dla dzieci [Bon or Tone. Savoir-vivre for Children]* by G. Kasdepke),
- false image of other people in social media and striving to constantly improve one's own image (*Wszystko dla lajków? Powiedz STOP fikcji w Internecie [Everything for Likes? Say STOP to Fiction on the Internet]* by J. Moore-Mallinos),
- addiction to computer games and social media (*Wiewiórczy z@kątek [Squirrel N@ck of the Woods]* by A. Studziński; *Komputerowy ćpun 2.0 [Computer Junkie 2.0]* by K. Piersy; cartoon film entitled *Złota rybka w szambie. Jak pokonać uzależnienie od smartfona i Internetu [The Goldfish in the Septic Tank: How to Overcome Smartphone and Internet Addiction]* by K. Piersy, 3...2...1... *Internet! Uzależnienie cz. 1 [3...2...1... Internet! Addiction Part 1]*, as well as to intoxicating substances (*Mam prawo! Czyli niemal wszystko, co powinniście wiedzieć o prawach dziecka, a nie macie kogo zapytać [I Have the Right! That is, Almost Everything You Should Know About Children's Rights, but Have No One to Ask About]* by G. Kasdepke).

Furthermore, manual activities (visual art therapy) served to promote alternative forms of leisure activities to online activities. As part of these activities, children created various artworks (drawings, stained glass, bookmarks, mini gardens, etc.), often using recycled and reclaimed materials, which also helped to shape pro-ecological attitudes among the participants.

In the opinion of those conducting the classes, they were very popular among both the participants and their teachers at school and parents. Therefore, in the coming years, the staff of the Regional Public Library in Pysznica plan to continue the series of

workshops devoted to addiction prevention for children and young people, based on the method of bibliotherapy. Undoubtedly, such activities can contribute to forming appropriate attitudes and behaviours in the virtual and real world. Listening to stories and fairy tales and discussing the issues they raise can influence the emotional development of participants, and using them to show what is right and worthy of imitation encourages the development of a specific set of values. It should also be remembered that reading books enriches knowledge and vocabulary, shapes the imagination, awakens sensitivity, and the passion for reading that is evoked can become an alternative to excessive activity in the virtual world.

This article does not exhaust the entire theme outlined in its title. The issues raised here unquestionably call for further research, in particular research into the effectiveness of original prevention programmes using bibliotherapy, aimed at counteracting cyber addiction among children and young people.

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