

Both in Poland and around the world, there is a growing concern about the mental health crisis of children and young people. Research and mental health professionals point to the negative impact of the media on the mental health of children and adolescents. The images and content viewed on the Internet often influence young people, who may forget that media portrayals do not always reflect reality, such as the idealized appearances on Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook.

Research studies conducted in Poland among 184 447 children and adolescents aged 10-19 years have shown that 32% of them did not accept who they were and how they looked. One-third participants reported regular dieting behaviours, and 43.3% of students experienced overeating or food restriction frequently in the past three months. 34.2% of children and adolescents exercised excessively even though they felt unwell. One-third of children and adolescents judged themselves through the lens of their bodies.

Social media is an important place for young people, where they spend at least 3-4 hours a day. Research results show that already spending three hours a day online can lead to lower body satisfaction. Additionally, 49.8% of students experienced online hate. For 42.6% of them, the hate was related to physical appearance.

Around the age of six, children form a construct called body image, which consists of body satisfaction. Preschool children, between the ages of five and six, begin to be aware that people judge each other and begin to judge themselves and others - body judgement is included in this assessment. Increasingly, younger children are presenting to mental health professionals with problems related to the body - body image disorders, dissatisfaction with their appearance or eating disorders.

An important aspect of children's development and later functioning is the quality of the emotional bond in their relationship with their parents. The most desirable - and supportive of the child's development and functioning - is a secure attachment style. In order to develop a secure attachment between the child and the parent, the emotional and physical availability of the caregiver, emotional tuning and sensitivity to the child's messages, and giving meaning to the child's behaviour are essential. In contrast to an anxious-ambivalent, anxious-avoidant or disorganised attachment style, a secure relationship with a parent helps to develop a positive image of oneself (and one's body).

The proposed project aims to investigate the role of parents in the development and maintenance of positive body image in children and adolescents. The project plans a yearly repeated study (three measurements) to see how body image develops in children and adolescents aged 8-14 years in relation to their developmental stage, attachment style to their parents, influence of media and experiences of family, friends, school and themselves. The project also plans workshops to support the development of positive body image in children aged 7-12. Some of them will attend the workshops with their parents, the rest without their parents. With this study, we will test whether the greater effectiveness of the workshops depends on whether the children's parents attend or not. In this study we will also take into account the children's age, their attachment style to their parents, the influence of the media and the children's experiences.

A total of 600 school-age children and 900 parents (fathers and mothers) will participate in the project. Conducting the planned research will add to the scientific knowledge on the relationship between the parent-child relationship and children's body image. The data from the research may provide important information for psychologists conducting preventive, workshop and psychoeducational interventions on the quality of the parent-child relationship and body image in children and adults. The research results may be useful in planning psychotherapeutic interventions for children and adults with body image problems and disorders.