

# Parental Internet Use and its Relationship with Maternal Mood in an Early Childhood Eating- and Sleeping Disorder Study



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## Introduction

In January 2017, the Early Childhood Eating and Sleeping Disorders Outpatient Clinic was established in the Budapest Heim Pal Children's Hospital. Besides clinical work, parents were invited to fill in questionnaires for research purposes.

### Aim of the study

Here, we aimed at assessing parental internet use and linking it with parental mood.

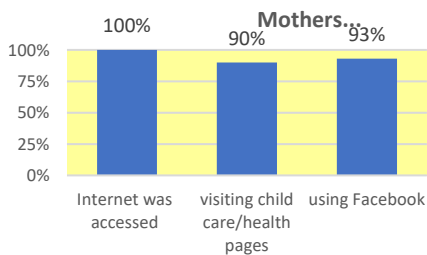
## Materials and methods

Data were collected from mothers of 62 and 321 children (46.5% boys, 53.5% girls, aged 0-36 months) with sleeping and eating problems, respectively. (n = 383)

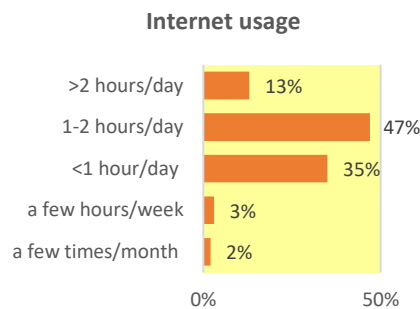
Data analyses focused on dimensions of mothers' current mood and their usage of internet.

## Results

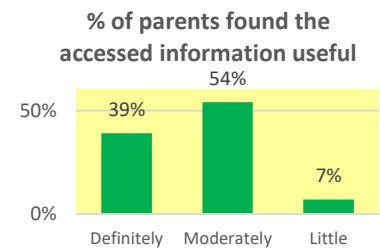
- 1** Internet was accessed in all households, with 90% of mothers visiting child care/health pages, 93% using Facebook.



- 2** Usage was skewed towards higher frequencies:



- 3** Regarding benefit, 39%, 54% and 7% of parents found the accessed information definitely, moderately and little useful, respectively.



- 4** The frequency of use and the perceived benefit were not related, nor was usage correlated with parental satisfaction regarding children's development, or with seeking medical help.

- 5** Internet use was positively correlated with parental *Fatigue* ( $\rho=0.11$ ,  $p=0.04$ ), especially in the subgroup with sleeping difficulties ( $\rho=0.30$ ,  $p=0.019$ , although *Internet usage* did not differ between the two clinical subgroups).

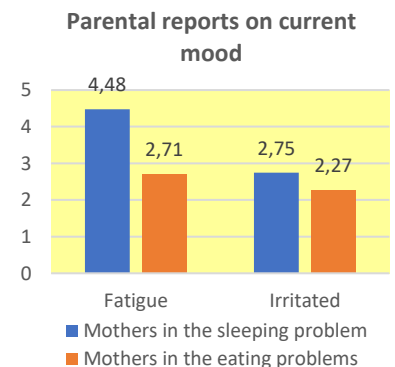
- 6** Parental reports on current mood were weakly, but significantly positively correlated with the frequency of Internet use in the whole sample:

Lonely	$\rho=0.16$	$p=0.003$
Depressed	$\rho=0.16$	$p=0.002$
Tense	$\rho=0.23$	$p<0.0005$
Irritated	$\rho=0.16$	$p<0.003$

Again, correlations were stronger in the subgroup with sleeping problems.

- 7** The two subgroups differed on some mood measures.

Mothers in the sleeping problem group felt more *Fatigue* (4.48 vs. 2.71,  $p<0.0005$ ) and were more *Irritated* (2.75 vs. 2.27,  $p=0.001$ ).



## Conclusions



Since parents widely use the Internet, it is important that professionals share highly reliable medical information and practical knowledge on websites frequented by parents.

Mothers, whose mood was negatively affected by the challenges of child care, especially when they struggled with difficulties, were likely to browse the Internet more frequently.

Establishing causal relationships needs further investigation.