

Net addicted adolescents at risk of mental health

Poonam R. Das

Department of Psychology, St. John's College, Agra, U.P.

The aim of the study was to see the impact of Internet Addiction on Mental Health. The sample comprised 70 adolescents (boys & girls) aged 14-18 years who were Internet users. The tools for assessment were Mental Health checklist (Kumar) and Internet Addiction Test (Young). The hypotheses that (1) Internet addiction affects mental health, (2) there is significant difference between Mental Health of Net Addicted and Net Non-Addicted subjects were proved. It was concluded that Internet Addicted had poor mental health.

Keywords: internet addiction, internet addiction disorder, depression

The seductive pull of digital devices is evident in our round the clock dependence on them. They have made life easy but not without irreparable damages. Truly speaking its more disadvantageous than advantageous when these devices are used in excess.

Internet has become an inevitable part of our lives but the growing addiction to it is alarming, because it is becoming an important cause of mental and physical ill health. Without a doubt the Net is a wonderful repository of information, we can verify facts, check multiple sources, connect with people, compare opinions and share information, it's the only quick access to all kinds of information. Ironically the Net by way of its design does not promote focused thinking, deep analysis or critical reflection; the tools of mind that are essential for grasping its benefits. The denominative access to information that the net provides is indeed its most potent feature. However the information does not automatically translate into knowledge unless it is analyzed and evaluated.

The following alarming headlines in leading newspapers indeed are sufficient evidence of Internet Addiction:

- Mother plays game (cafe world) as baby drown in tub and dies.
- 'For children, Texting and Facebook worse than T.V. Adverse effect on Academic performance'.
- Social Sites cause moral decline.
- India on the second place regarding Cyber Crimes after China.
- Not online gives depression.
- E-Net working sites cost employers billions.
- Hours at PC can give wrinkles to women.
- Laptops can cause 'toasted skin syndrome' infertility by way of decrease sperms production.

Sankaranarayan (2012) reports, 'adults complain that children do not read books'. She adds, 'adults are losing the ability to maintain sustained focus on a book as reading on a screen is different in sensory and psychological way'. Slow Internet connections frustrate us..... 'We become intolerant, seldom indulge in self-reflection, we become close virtually but become distant from people, as there is less time for actual interactions'.

Arshad (2012) in his article 'Conversations Killer; All the Action PC Online' comments that children are behaving as celebrities, putting everything on Net, which later on may shatter their public image and even affect their personal lives..... putting too much time and energy in the virtual world is affecting existing patterns of

social life.....Children do not play and compete in annual sports to win medals. The initial obsession with social net working among the youth gets transformed into addiction and makes them feel like misfits and maladjusted in community life.

Padhi (2012) adds "it is like taking an escape route and associating it with style and status symbol.

Net usage becomes addiction

When the user starts neglecting himself, shuns responsibility, becomes a loser, isolates him, feels irritated and tensed when deprived to use Net, feels lost and lonely, neglects his studies/job, there is absenteeism at school/college and workplace etc. all these are symptoms similar to any kind of addiction.

The question is why people became addicted to Net? It may be due to its following characteristics:

- Easy Access.
- Stimulation (colors, fast pace, ease of use and interactive qualities).
- Anonymity (inhibition is removed as users do not know each other they can be whatever they want).
- Timeless usage, there is no track of time.

Internet can be addicting to the point that it disturbs one's life and the lives of those around him/her. Actually spending a lot of time on internet isn't necessarily a problem, but becomes an addiction problem if one is neglecting relationships, responsibilities, or other important things in life, when it cuts loneliness, acts as anytime anywhere support system, takes time away from a real life relationship.

Internet addiction was recognized as early as 1990's as a new type of addiction and mental health problem. The signs and symptoms are similar to other addiction. The other kinds of addiction are not associated with pleasure as computer and internet. Like all other addictions Internet Addiction is a psycho-physiological disorder involving (1) intolerance (2) two or more withdrawal symptoms (3) use of internet to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms (4) its use for longer periods than was intended (5) lot of time is spent in activities related to internet (6) important social and recreational activities are given up (7) loss of relationships, jobs, educational, and career opportunities, feeling of restlessness and irritability when attempt to cut down or stop internet use. (8) using internet as a way of escape problems or relieving feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, or depression (9) the user lies to the family or friends to conceal extent of involvement with the internet (10) user returns repeatedly despite excessive fees.

Due to the nature of Internet addiction Disorder (failed impulse control without involving an intoxicant) of all other addictions, Internet Addiction disorder is said to be closest to pathological gambling. However the effects that the addiction can have on every aspect of person's life are just as devastating as those of alcoholism.

There are five types of Internet Addiction:

- Cyber relationship Addiction.
- Information overload Addiction.
- Computer Addiction.
- Games addiction.
- Sex addiction.
- Screen Addiction.

There are risk factors identified for Internet Addiction.....like anxiety, OCD, depression, other addiction, lack of social support and social status, less mobility and less social activities.

Probable causes of Internet Addiction:

- Pervasive appeal of the Internet.
- Lack of parental supervision.
- A substitute for what one doesn't have.
- Anonymity.
- Developmental immaturity.
- Excess time.

Some warning signs of Internet Addiction:

- Excessive fatigue & other physical problems.
- Academic deterioration.
- Withdrawal from friends.
- Skipping meals & losing sleep.
- Decline in interest in hobbies.
- Disobedience and acting out.
- Financial problems.

Main Health implications of Internet Addiction (physical)

- Posture & tension.
- Digestion problems.
- Electromagnetic Radiation.
- Chronic Headaches (Psychological).
- Attention deficient.
- Withdrawal symptoms
- Tension.
- Breathing and Blood circulation.
- Skin problems.
- Eye problems.
- Anxiety.
- Depression.
- Self injurious behavior.

Aim: The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of Internet Addiction on Mental Health of Adolescents.

Objectives of the study

- To identify Net User subjects.
- To assess the Net Addiction of subjects.
- To assess Mental Health of Net Addicted and not Net addicted subjects.
- To compare the mental health of Net Addicted and not Net Addicted subjects.

Hypotheses of the study

- The Mental Health of adolescents is affected by Net Addicted.
- There is significant difference between Mental Health of Net Addicted and not Net Addicted Subjects.

Variables:

Independent Variables: Internet Addiction.

Dependent Variables: Mental Health.

Method

Participants

The selection of 70 net user subjects (boys & girls aged 14-18 yrs) was done as per purposive sampling from different Intermediate Colleges of Agra.

Instruments

Mental Health Checklist constructed and standardized by Pramod Kumar was used to assess mental health of subjects. It consists of 11 items in a 4 points rating format. The split half reliability was .70, and test-retest reliability was .65. The face validity was fairly high and content validity was adequately assured as the symptoms showed 100% agreement.

Internet Addiction Test introduced by Kimberly Young was used to assess Internet Addiction. There are 20 items (questionnaire on which respondents are asked to rate items on a five point Likert scale) that measure mild, moderate and severe levels of Internet addiction.

Procedure

The Investigator, after establishing rapport with the subjects administered the Internet Addiction test and Mental Health checklist. The data was analyzed with the help of Chi-square. The obtained result was interpreted.

Results and Discussion

Table showing Internet Addiction and Mental Health of Subjects in different Categories

Mental Health	Internet Addiction			Total
	Severe	Moderate	Mild	
Good	0.4 (6%)	12 (17.14%)	13 (19%)	29
Moderate	05 (7.14%)	06 (9%)	03 (4.28%)	14
Poor	23 (33%)	02 (3%)	02 (3%)	27
Total	32 (46%)	20 (29%)	18 (26%)	70

X²=30.96, df=4, significant at .01 level

The subjects who were severely net addicted and had poor mental health need immediate attention. Even those subjects who are moderately net addicted also need good supervision so that they may not become net addicted in future. The subjects who were in the category of mild internet addiction and reported poor mental health (2 out of 18) also need attention. Their poor mental health may be due to other reasons also.

The responses of net addicted subjects were analyzed and it was found that they were suffering from loss of sleep, forgetfulness, exhaustion and fatigue. They also reported irritability, lack of concentration, stress, tension, and anxiety. Others problems identified were depression, hostility, withdrawal, isolation in school and attention deficit. They had lot of pending work also.

Dotmga (2010) in a study 'Internet Addicts more prone to depression, reports that Internet Addicts are more likely to show signs of depression.

Morrison (2010) in her study reported that subjects deemed as "Internet Addicts" had a higher incidence of moderate to severe depression. Out of 1319 subjects aged 16 to 51 years, 1.2% were addicted to the internet. The question was "are depressed people drawn to Internet/does the Internet causes depression." Morrison says, "What is clear is that, for a small subset of people, excessive use of the Internet could be a warning signal for depression and depressive tendencies".

Amar Ujala (2010, Kanpur) in a survey identified 65 people with Internet Syndrome, who were in high socioeconomic class. They were diagnosed with depression and sleep walking disorder.

According to CNN (2009) it was reported in Taiwan, that Internet Addiction is linked to a range of Mental Health Disorders. Sample consisted of 2000 students who were studied for two years beginning in 7th grade. 10% were addicted to Internet when the study began. Although ADHD and hostility were found in both genders, only girls appeared to be at higher risk for depression and social phobia.

In a study done in USA by Rozen (2011) in the University of California, it was stated that due to facebook there is threat of failing social networking, websites have negative impact on students and they regress in their studies continuously. They start getting low grades, and also develop behavioral disorders and self-centeredness. The students who are constantly on facebook are able to concentrate on studies only for 15 minutes. They lose their concentration due to constantly checking their facebook account. He also found that the attention of such children is diverted after every three minutes while they are doing their main work. If they came to know they are being supervised they pretend as if they are studying, though their mind is stuck on facebook. The habit of login to facebook after every 15 minutes makes them shirker.

Poolman, Greenfield and Layered (2011), with 200 more experts in their study 'Victims of Life style have expressed their concern that children are becoming 'victims of Life-Style' due to T.V. and Computers. In their findings they stated that commercial stress is dominating the brain of children, they are drifting away from games, sports and physical activities, they spend more time at home on computers and T.V. Their children are losing their childhood and become mature before the scheduled developmental stage.

A new study was done by sociologist Hui-Tzu, Chou and Edge, (2012) at Utah Valley University, London, on the sample of 425 undergraduate students, who were interviewed about theirs and friend's happiness. 95% used websites, on average they were on it for 2½ years, spent nearly five hours a week on it. The finding was, the more hours people spent on facebook, strange was their agreement that others were happier.

Carr (2012) found that people's comprehension of a short story was better when they read it in print form as opposed to a "web version". 'E-Book' provides all the distractions of the net-worked computer thereby destroying the "linearity of the printed book and the calm attentiveness it encourages in readers". Even as we work, e-mail updates, news flashes, and download reminders vie for own limited attention.

Dietz (2008) reports that 5.9% of participants in his study stated that Internet use had negative effect on their personal relationship, 8.2% said that Internet was used as a means of escape from the real world. Individuals who are Internet Addicted frequently fail to attend to important responsibility related to educational or career pursuits. Often interpersonal relations suffer because addicted individuals focus all his attention on building relationships online / simply do not have the time to put into real world relationships. At times they become so involved in Internet activity, that they totally neglect their self- care and people have died after failing to eat, drink /sleep enough because of the time they spend online.

Jang, Chieh- Ju (2007) in their study navigated the difference between Internet addicts and Non-Internet addicts. The sample comprised 1708 adolescents from high schools Internet Addiction Diagnostic questionnaire (Young 1995) was used for assessment. The findings were (a) Internet Addicts spent twice as many hours on

line on average than the Non- Addicts (b) they obtained markedly higher scores than Non-Addicts on subscales of tolerance, compulsive use and withdrawals, related problems (family, school, health) interpersonal and financial problems. (c) Subjects with personalities characterized by dependence, shyness, depression and low self-esteem had tendency to become addicted.

The above studies are congruent with the present study and steps have to be taken to prevent Internet addiction not its usage.

Warnings on the basis of research studies ;

- Details on Internet are at risk. A hacker could do many things with your data.
- Deteriorations in health.
- Family relations can become weak.

The Counselor's counsel to prevent Internet Addiction

- Parents must spend quality time with children/child. It is essential that inspite of their busy schedule they have to manage time for their children.
- Spouses should give quality time to each other to strengthen their relationships, while driving and eating switch off your computer, T.V. and cell phone.
- Strike a balance between the time one devotes to social networking and to real time conversation

Conclusion

- There is adverse impact of internet addiction on mental health.
- Excessive internet usage also becomes the cause of several physical ailments

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