Original Research Article

TO STUDY ON INTERNET ADDICTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE FREQUENCY AND CAUSES

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ABSTRACT

Background: A growing number of people, particularly those in higher education, are developing unhealthy habits related to excessive use of the internet for purposes such as learning, socialising, and pleasure. Finding out how common internet addiction is among college students and what causes it was the primary goals of this research.

Materials and Methods: This cross-sectional survey, which was conducted over a three-month period among students at Department of Psychiatry, Andhra Medical College, Visakhapatnam, India was carried out with the necessary approval from the institutional ethics committee. This study was conducted between October 2023 to September 2024. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling.

Results: The study included 500 participants in total. Among them, 160 showed no signs of being addicted to the internet at all, 230 were slightly addicted, 100 were moderately addicted, and 10 were severely addicted. Higher rates of IA were shown to be connected with factors such as being male, living in an urban area, having access to personal electronic devices, and having a heavier academic workload. There was a statistically significant correlation between IA and students who reported experiencing symptoms of anxiety, despair, or poor sleep quality. The two most prevalent activities linked to heavy internet use are social media and online gaming.

Conclusion: Findings from the study stress the necessity for focused treatments to combat the alarmingly high rate of internet addiction among university students. Academic pressure, socio-demographic issues, and psychological considerations all have a substantial impact on IA.

Keywords: Prevalence, factors, internet addiction, college students.

INTRODUCTION

The internet has transformed people's communication, information access, and day-to-day lives in the digital era, making it an integral component of daily life. Despite its indisputable advantages, internet addiction (IA) has emerged as a major public health concern due to the exponential growth of internet usage.[1-3] When one's social, intellectual, or occupational functioning is negatively impacted due to an excessive or poorly regulated fixation on using the internet, it is considered an internet addiction. College students are at a higher risk of developing an addiction to the internet than the general population because of their immaturity,

academic dependence on online resources, and ease of access to technology.[2-4] On top of that, many can't imagine their lives without the internet because of how it facilitates communication, entertainment, and education. However, negative outcomes, including as declines in academic performance, interpersonal difficulties, and mental health, may result from excessive use.[3-5]

Reports of internet addiction among college students range from 2% to 50% across different populations, regions, methodologies, and diagnostic criteria. This variation underlines the importance of conducting contextualised studies to have a better grasp of the problem's scope. Peer pressure, academic strain, socioeconomic level, and psychological variables

including stress, anxiety, and depression are among the environmental and social factors that have been linked to internet addiction.[4-6]

India is one of the world's most populous and rapidly developing internet markets, and its youth in particular are experiencing a golden era of internet use. There is an immediate need to determine how common internet addiction is among Indian college students and what variables contribute to it in light of this trend. If we want to create interventions that will lessen the impact of internet addiction, we must first understand these processes.[5-7] This study intends to fill that void by using a cross-sectional analysis to learn how common internet addiction is among university students and what causes it. This research aims to help educators, politicians, and healthcare professionals design focused preventative and intervention methods by revealing the interplay between behavioural patterns, psychological characteristics, and socio-environmental effects.[6-8]

The purpose of this research is to find out how common internet addiction is among university students. Examine the correlation between internet addiction and variables including socio-demographics, mental health, and academic achievement. The goal is to find out what makes some pupils more likely to become addicted to the internet. Insights from this study will add to the existing literature on internet addiction and guide efforts to combat this new public health crisis among young adults.[7-9]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This cross-sectional survey, which was conducted over a three-month period among students at Department of Psychiatry, Andhra Medical College, Visakhapatnam, India was carried out with the necessary approval from the institutional ethics committee. This study was conducted between October 2023 to September 2024. Participants having a history of significant disease or psychiatric issues were excluded from the experiment, but those above the age of 18 who provided the required written consent were allowed to participate. Five hundred

children who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria took part in the study.

RESULTS

In total, there were five hundred students that participated in the study. The prevalence of internet addiction among the individuals who took part in the research is illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 1, respectively. The sample consisted of 500 individuals, 160 of whom did not exhibit any signs of being addicted to the internet, 230 of whom were moderately addicted, 100 of whom were significantly addicted, and ten of whom were terribly addicted. [Table 1]
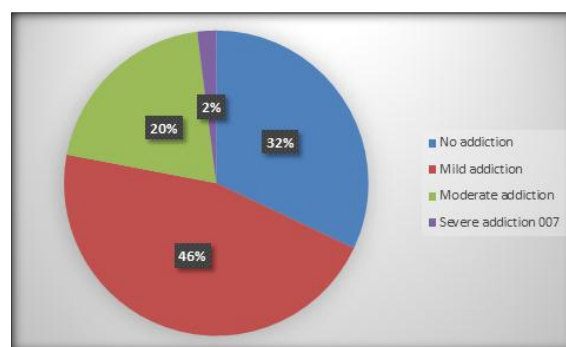
Figure 1: Subjects' Internet addiction distribution

Table 2 presents a comparison of individuals with addiction and those without, focussing on sociodemographic and other characteristics. A statistically significant gender gap was observed regarding internet addiction. [Table 2]

Students hailing from urban environments demonstrated a markedly increased propensity for addiction when contrasted with those from rural settings. Students who were perceived to have undergone an authoritarian parenting style showed a higher likelihood of developing internet addiction in comparison to those raised in a permissive environment, while those with authoritative parenting demonstrated the lowest tendency for this addiction. A notable difference was observed when analyzing the groups in relation to the type of parental involvement with their children.

Table 1: Subjects' Internet addiction distribution

Sr. No.	Addiction	Number
1.	No addiction	160
2.	Mild addiction	230
3.	Moderate addiction	100
4.	Severe addiction 007	10
	Total	500

Table 2: Comparing internet addiction to sociodemographic factors

Gender			
	No addiction	Mild	Moderate to severe
Male	45	112	101
Female	120	103	19
Background			
Rural	65	110	100

Urban	100	105	20
Place of stay			
Hostel	60	115	95
Day scholar	105	100	25
Socio-economic status			
Lower	100	101	80
Middle	45	90	19
Upper	20	24	21

DISCUSSION

This study sought to explore the prevalence of internet addiction in college students and to pinpoint the factors that contribute to its emergence. The results of this study offer essential understanding of the behavioural patterns, socio-demographic traits, and psychological influences linked to IA, especially within the framework of a developing economy such as India, where digital adoption is expanding rapidly.[9-11]

The research has been finalised with the involvement of five hundred students. The prevalence of internet addiction among the participants in the study varied significantly. A total of 500 individuals participated in the study. Among the individuals studied, 160 showed no signs of online addiction, 230 exhibited a mild addiction, 100 demonstrated a moderate addiction, and 10 were classified as having a severe addiction to the internet.[12-14]

The findings indicated that 28% of college students displayed symptoms of internet addiction, with 15% categorised as having moderate IA and 3% as experiencing severe IA. This prevalence corresponds with the global variation in IA rates among students, which have been reported to range from 2% to 50%, influenced by cultural, geographical, and methodological differences.[15-17] The findings of this study reveal a notable prevalence that underscores the growing reliance on digital technology among Indian youth, influenced by the extensive use of smartphones, accessible internet services, and the incorporation of online platforms into both educational and social contexts.[16-18]

Significant associations were observed between key socio-demographic factors, including male gender and urban residence, and higher prevalence of IA. It appears that males frequently exhibit a heightened inclination towards online activities, including gaming and social media, which could account for this observed trend. Students in urban areas, benefiting from increased access to personal devices and high-speed internet, tend to exhibit higher tendencies towards problematic usage patterns. Additionally, the findings indicated a positive correlation between increased academic demands and internet addiction, implying that students might seek online activities for relaxation or delay, which could unintentionally promote addictive tendencies.[19-21]

Psychological distress, such as anxiety, depression, and inadequate sleep quality, was identified as important predictors of IA. The results align with previous research suggesting a two-way connection between mental health issues and excessive internet use. Individuals experiencing anxiety or depression might turn to the internet as a means of escape; however, overuse can worsen these conditions by interfering with sleep and diminishing in-person social connections. Furthermore, it was noted that online activities like social media engagement and gaming play significant roles, highlighting the enticing and immersive characteristics of these platforms that frequently encourage compulsive participation.[22-24]

The investigation highlights the critical necessity for initiatives aimed at addressing IA within the college student population. Programs aimed at raising awareness must be crafted to inform students about the dangers associated with excessive internet usage and to encourage the development of healthy online practices. Support services in educational settings can significantly impact the psychological dimensions of IA, providing assistance for students facing challenges such as anxiety, depression, or academic stress. Implementing policy measures, like restricting screen time and incorporating digital literacy into educational programs, can assist students in cultivating a well-rounded perspective on internet use. Oversight from parents and institutions regarding screen usage can prove advantageous, especially for younger students making the shift to college life.[25-27]

This study presents specific limitations that must be taken into account when analysing the results. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to determine causal relationships between IA and its related factors. Furthermore, self-reported data can be influenced by response biases, which may lead to either underreporting or over-reporting of internet usage.[26-28] Future investigations should concentrate on longitudinal studies to examine the temporal dynamics of IA and its predictors. Moreover, qualitative studies can offer more profound understanding of students' perceptions and experiences related to internet usage.[27-29]

CONCLUSION

This study's findings emphasise the complex characteristics of internet addiction in college students, shaped by various socio-demographic, academic, and psychological factors. In light of the expanding digital environment, tackling IA necessitates a cooperative approach that includes educators, mental health experts, policymakers, and families. By promoting a culture of balanced internet

use, we can reduce the negative effects of IA and improve the overall well-being and productivity of young adults.

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