

## Internet usage and happiness: a comparison of working and non-working mothers

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### ABSTRACT

Internet usage and happiness are eminent constructs affecting well-being and perceptions of a good life. The present study was conducted to explore the differences in the level of internet usage, happiness, and the relationship between these variables in working and non-working mothers. Internet usage was measured using the Internet Addiction Test (Young, 1998) and happiness was measured using the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999). Data was obtained from 110 women between the age of 30-40 years. Analysis of data presented a significant difference in the level of internet usage and happiness between working and non-working mothers. Furthermore, a significant negative correlation was obtained between internet usage and happiness.

**Keywords:** *Internet Addiction, Happiness, Working Women*

Internet access has increased dramatically over the last decade (Hardie and Tee, 2007). It has been both a boon and a bane, with the increase in ease of availability. From casual surfers to working online, it has become an indispensable tool in today's time (Lenhart et al., 2007). Despite the benefits that the internet has brought in all spheres of life, concerns over its misuse and overuse are also on the rise. Internet addiction has increased the prevalence of psychological disturbances along with an increased chaos in interpersonal relationships (Hur, 2006). Increasing amount of time surfing the net has impacted mental health and occupational aspects of life as well (Chou and Hsiao, 2000; Griffiths, 2000). Happiness on the other hand, is a subjective term. Each individual has a different perception which they use for the process of meaning making. This process of meaning making then, give rise to the self-reported perceptions of how happy an individual is. Higher perceived happiness is linked to positive emotions (Diener and Seligman, 2002) and satisfaction with life (Diener et al., 2002). There is no doubt that internet addiction impacts the perception of happiness for an individual, but to what extent, is the question to be pondered over.

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Women are the pillars on which the society rests. They take on multiple roles, and fulfill them beautifully. Many women bear the responsibility of excelling both at work and simultaneously managing the household. But gender role socialization has put immense pressure on women to prove their worth and ability as a good mother, wife and homemaker. Working women further, bear the brunt of breaking the glass ceiling and excelling at the workplace to justify their positions. To understand the manifestations of internet usage and more importantly its impact on happiness is hence much needed.

### ***Internet addiction***

Access to the internet has become quintessential for connecting with others. Mothers often use the internet to access nutritional, healthcare and educational demands of their children apart from social networking. They use the internet to exchange information and receive social support (Hall & Irvine, 2009; McDaniel, Coyne, & Holmes, 2012). Skranes et al. (2014) reported how parents use the internet often for the child's healthcare needs. The internet has emerged as an expedient tool, but concerns over problematic internet use (PIU), which negatively affects the users' emotional stability, social life and interpersonal relationships is increasing (Ko et al., 2012). Young (1999a) defined internet addiction as a broad term which includes a variety of behavioral and impulse control problems. Excessive internet usage is related to sleep problems and excessive daytime sleepiness (Singh et al., 2019), psychological distress including depression (Anand et al., 2018) along with lower psychological well-being, anxiety and loss of emotional control (Gedam et al., 2017). There is an increase in the number of parents who are addicted to the internet, especially young mothers who turn to the internet for support and companionship due to overwhelming feelings of motherhood. But Young (1998) reported how internet addiction increases the chance of child neglect. Spending more time online comes at the cost of cutting out valuable social interactions with family, friends and peers. Family ties may be affected due to spending time online (Nie & Erbring, 2002), along with work performance, isolating individuals from healthy and optimum social activities (Tokunaga, 2012). Individuals with low self esteem are more susceptible to be being affected by internet addiction as they prefer online interactions over face to face interactions as a safer route of self expression (Caplan, 2006). This in turn, may increase the dependence on the internet, and lead to a further increase in internet usage to escape the negative moods (LaRose, Lin and Eastin, 2003).

Literature on internet usage has focused more on adolescents and young adults, with little attention given to women, and especially working and non-working mothers (Byun et al., 2009; Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Internet addiction has been reported to be negatively correlated with the various components of self esteem (Aydm and San, 2011). High levels of internet usage are associated with social isolation and depression (Shklovski, Kraut, & Cummings, 2006). Increased time on the internet reduces the individual's face to face communication with family and friends and increases loneliness (Amichai-Hamburger, Fine, and Goldstein, 2004). Bargh et al. (2004) however, reported that internet use could decrease loneliness by helping people connect with friends and family at a distance.

### ***Happiness***

Positive psychologists have focused immensely on happiness, flow and well-being, and especially on positive experiences. Myers and Diener (1995) explained positive experiences through happiness, or a state of contentment. Happiness has a wide range of definitions, be it philosophical or psychological. Aristotle defined happiness as a sort of living in which the individual flourishes and lives actively; that which is full of intrinsic values, complete and meaningful (Kraut, 1979). In psychological terms, subjective happiness is defined as a state

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of joy, contentment and well-being. It evolved from positive psychology and is a significant construct of human life (Lyubomirsky, 2001). It is the level of happiness, as reported from the respondent's own view, as pursuing the goal of happiness is an important goal for humans across ages (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Schkade, 2005). Diener (2000) defined happiness as a predominance of positive affect and negative affect along with a high level of life satisfaction. The terms happiness and subjective well being have been used interchangeably (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Happiness has two components, namely affective and cognitive. The former corresponds to hedonic happiness, or the degree of experiencing positive affective. The latter corresponds to the degree to which an individual perceives that his/her aspirations are met (Brulde, 2007; Kashdan, 2004). Happiness therefore, is an amalgamation of these two and is essential for life satisfaction.

Differences in the way individuals respond to situations, or perceive their situations is imperative since it affects the level of happiness. While some individuals may report a high level of happiness despite adversities, others may report lower levels even with little or discomfort in life at all. Happiness hence, is a subjective term and has emerged as a growing concern of study for positive psychologists (Doman, 2010; Lyubomirsky, 2001). It is associated with one's self-perception of life satisfaction, well-being and positive emotions (Diener and Seligman, 2002). Happier individuals have more positive self perceptions with more intense positive emotions to positive events. Subjective happiness is relatively stable over time and impacts the way an individual perceives and interprets experiences positively or negatively (Lyubomirsky and Tucker, 1998). Positive individual traits, virtues and human strengths like subjective happiness. Optimism and hope are extremely important to prevent psychological distresses and enhance the quality of life (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Research pertinent to happiness in working and non working women has yielded mixed results. Some report benefits of the multiple social roles adopted by working women being associated with greater happiness (Berger 2013a; Lahelma et al. 2002). Treas, Lippe and Tai (2011) collated data from 28 countries and reported that homemakers were slightly happier than working women. They reported that working mothers were at a greater risk of elevated stress level, lesser happiness, and lower work life balance as compared to homemakers. Similar findings were reported by (Hamplova, 2018).

### ***Relationship between the variables***

The increase in internet usage is a prevalent phenomenon affecting an individual's psychological and social life. Research on the level and impact of internet usage among working and non-working mothers is extremely scanty. Happiness, stress and loneliness are indicators of psychological well-being, and are influenced by the level of internet usage (Augner & Hacker, 2012). Muusses et al. (2014) reported that an increase in happiness predicted a decrease in internet usage. Excessive internet usage is associated with lower happiness, increased stress, depression, lower self esteem (Byun et al., 2009; Tokunaga & Rains, 2010). Akin (2012) also reported internet addiction to be negatively associated with subjective happiness. Subjective happiness is characterized by satisfaction with life, and hence is negatively associated with internet addiction (Lin, Lin and Wu, 2010). Internet addiction has been shown to affect happiness negatively in adolescents (Yavuz, 2019). A decrease in Smartphone and internet addiction is posited to improve happiness among adults (Kim Byung-Man, 2018).

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### *Present study*

The present study aimed at gaining insight into seeing whether internet addiction is manifested different in working and non-working women. The concept has gained wide popularity with an increase in both, the number of users and the time devoted to internet usage. It was considered imperative to see how internet usage may affect happiness among these women as well, and whether there exists any differences in the level of happiness among working and non working women. The rationale behind the present variables and sample remains that both the variables are studied largely in the context of adolescents and young adults. Little research is done on women, especially with respect to the occupational differences.

### *Hypothesis*

- H1:** There will be a significant difference between the level of Internet usage among working and non-working women.
- H2:** There will be a significant difference between the level of Happiness among working and non-working women.
- H3:** There will be a significant relationship between internet usage and happiness

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Sample*

The sample consisted of 110 women between the age of 30-40 years, who had children studying in grades II-V. The participants were further divided into an equal number of working (n=55) and non working women (n=55) and belonged to upper middle class economic background with graduation as their minimum qualification. None of the women were divorced/ separated and could comprehend English with ease.

### *Instruments*

Internet usage was measured using the Internet Addiction Test (IAT; Young, 1998). It is a 20item test to assess problems related to personal, social and occupational functioning. Questions are answered on a 5-point Likert scale to assess compulsivity, dependency and escapism. The test displays good split half reliability (.85) and validity (.92). For the present study, scores on the IAT will be taken as a reflection of internet behavior and usage by the groups and not the level of internet addiction per se.

Happiness was measured using the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999). The SHS is a 4 item self-report measure, used to assess an individual's overall happiness through self-evaluation. Items are responded to on a 7 point Likert Scale, with higher scores depicting higher subjective happiness. The test items characterize individuals on absolute ratings, ratings relative to peers, and on the extent to which they relate to descriptions of happy and unhappy individuals. The scale displays good Cronbach's alpha reliability (.79-.94) and convergent validity (.52-.72).

### *Procedure*

Data was collected from the participants after taking down the demographic details and ensuring confidentiality. The IAT was administered followed by the SHS. Data was subjected to analysis through t test and Pearson's Correlation.

## **RESULTS**

Data collected through the questionnaires was analyzed using t test and Pearson correlation. The results are presented below:

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**Table I. Test of means of Internet Usage and Happiness in working (W) and non-working (NW) mothers**

Variable	t value	p value	Mean		SD	
			W	NW	W	NW
Internet Usage	-4.55**	<.000	24.91	39.6	16.07	17.76
Happiness	2.86**	0.005	21.29	19.02	3.96	4.35

Significant difference at \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*  $p < .05$  based on *t* statistics

Data analysis from Table I reveals that there is a significant difference in the level of internet usage among working and non-working mothers [ $t(110) = -4.55, p < .01$ ]. Higher internet usage was reported by non-working mothers (39.6) as compared to working mothers (24.91). However, a significantly higher level of subjective happiness [ $t(110) = 2.86, p < .01$ ] was reported by working mothers (21.29) as compared to non-working mothers (19.02)

**Table II. Correlation between Internet Usage (IU) and Happiness (H) in total sample (n=110)**

	IU	H
IU	1	
H	-.45**	1

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

The analysis revealed that internet usage is correlated with happiness (-.45,  $p < 0.01$ ). Although the negative correlation obtained was moderate, it is significant.

**Table III. Correlation between Internet Usage (IU) and Happiness (H) in working and non-working mothers (n=55)**

	Working		Non-working	
	IU	H	IU	H
IU	1		IU	1
H	-.28*	1	H	-.47**

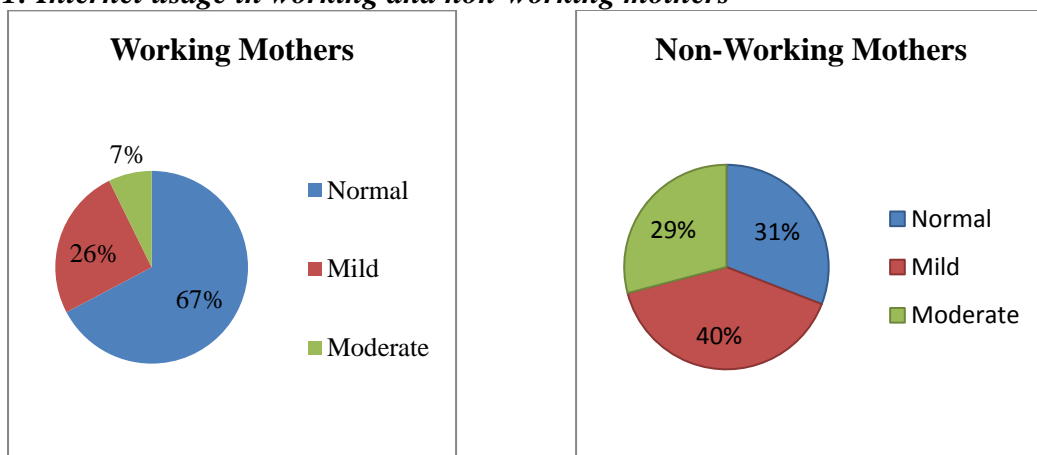
\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

It was

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

observed that the scores of non-working mothers were more strongly correlated for internet usage and happiness (-.47,  $p < 0.01$ ) as compared to working mothers (-.28,  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Figure 1: Internet usage in working and non-working mothers**



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Analysis of data further revealed only 31% of non-working mothers fell into the normal usage category of the IAT, whereas 67% non-working women had normal internet usage. The percentage of working mothers falling into the mild (26%) and moderate (7%) internet usage was much lower to that of non-working mothers (40% and 29% resp).

### DISCUSSION

The ease of availability and access to the internet has brought new opportunities as well as challenges to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Connecting over social media or browsing the net for healthcare is done at the click of a button. However, youth and adults alike have reported an increase in the internet usage over the years, affecting their well-being. The changing lifestyle has also impacted how individuals perceive and give meaning to situations, thereby affecting how happy they feel. Subjective happiness is an overall evaluation of one's life experiences that is related to the perceived quality of life and well-being (Diener, 2000). To unearth the interplay of these variables and how they are experienced differently by women who are working and homemakers thus, is important especially keeping in mind the challenges that are accompanied by both the roles.

The first hypothesis positing that there will be a difference in the level of internet usage by working and non-working mothers was accepted. Non-working mothers reported a significantly higher amount of internet usage, along with a higher percentage of women falling into mild and moderate levels of internet addiction as compared to working mothers. There has been an extensive literature on internet usage among youth, but extremely few studies have attempted to investigate the same in working and nonworking mothers. Prior studies have reported that hours spent online decrease with a rise in income (Godfarb and Prince, 2008). However, some studies report that housewives use the internet much lesser than other populations due to not being as tech-savvy as others (Lera-López, Margarita Billonb and María Gilb, 2009), or due to the manifestation of patriarchy which puts the burden of managing the household solely on the housewife, thus leaving little time for self-care (Lestari and Sunarto, 2018). Al-Saggaf et al. (2017) reported that presence of a family dependent and marital status had a negative impact on internet usage for women. The present findings can be attributed to the fact that the sample employed for the research comprised of well-educated women who were well updated with the technological advancements, and could use it with ease. The internet is not limited to social media platforms, but is also a medium to inculcate and indulge in various activities (Chauhan and Maniar, 2018), hobbies and learning. From cooking videos to educational courses available, a wide plethora of activities are at the disposal of individuals accessing the internet. Non-working mothers often use the internet to exchange information and receive social support (Hall & Irvine, 2009). Skranes et al. (2014) reported how parents use the internet often for the child's healthcare needs. Working mothers on the other hand, have the dual task of contributing efficiently to the work requirements as well as managing the household, leaving little time for surfing the net perhaps.

The second hypothesis which states that significant differences exist in the level of subjective happiness between working and non working mothers was accepted. Working mothers reported a higher level of happiness than non working mothers. The results were in sync with literature indicating that working women experience greater happiness than non working women (Boye 2009; Roos et al. 2005). Nathawat and Mishra (2019) also reported high life satisfaction and self esteem among working women. Similar findings were reported by other researchers too (Arshad et al., 2015; Singh, 2014). This could be attributed to the fact that the financial benefits associated with working and adding to the household income

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may increase feelings of happiness (Easterlin 2001). Having a broad social network due to one's occupation may further increase happiness and life satisfaction (Bartolini, Bilancini and Pugno 2013). Increase in the number of social roles too, may impact the level of happiness according to the enhancement theory (Klumb and Lampert 2004), thus supporting the present findings. A lower amount of internet usage reported by working women could also explain a higher level of subjective happiness. One on hand, subjective happiness is associated with life satisfaction and well-being (Diener, 2000; Suh, Diener et al., 1998), whereas internet addiction is associated with maladaptive manifestations like depression, poor mental health (Young and Rogers, 1998), anxiety (Ferraro et. al, 2006), stress (Akin & Iskender, 2011), loneliness, lower self esteem (Ye et al., 2007).

The third hypothesis positing a significant relationship between internet usage and happiness was accepted. A negative correlation was found between the variables. Although moderate, the correlation was significant. The present result is in sync with previous research that shows how greater internet usage is negatively associated to well-being (Young and Rogers, 1998). Ansari et al.(2016) reported similar results. Hall (2016) reported that the amount of time spent using the internet had a negative relationship to measures of happiness. Iskender and Akin (2010) reported a negative correlation between internet addiction and subjective vitality. The negative impact of internet addiction can be seen through its relationship with unfavorable aspects leading to reduced well-being and increased stress (Piqueras et al., 2011). However, the relationship of subjective happiness to positive emotions (Diener & Seligman, 2002), enhanced well-being (Diener, 2000) and self esteem can be thus, be used to explain why a negative correlation exists between happiness and increased internet usage. Similar findings were obtained by other researchers as well (Ferraro et al., 2007).

## CONCLUSION

Significant differences were obtained among working and non working mothers in the level of internet usage and happiness. Working mothers reported lesser internet use and higher level of happiness as compared to non working mothers. A moderate but significant negative correlation was found between internet usage and happiness. Research on internet usage and happiness among working and non working mothers is very scanty. Literature on internet addiction especially, has been done mostly on young adults or adolescents. Importance must be given to understanding how the Indian women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are making use of the internet. Moreover, it is imperative to understand the kind of activities that working and non-working mothers engage in, to better understand the nature of internet usage. The kind of challenges faced by women in both arenas should also be taken into account, to understand why there is a need to resort to the internet. Both protective and risk factors in the escalation of internet usage from normal to severe are quintessential to be studied due to the co-morbidity of several maladaptive variables like depression, anxiety and deteriorating well-being which accompany internet addiction.

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