

K-Pop Wave in India – An Exploration among BTS Army Adolescents During Lockdown

Bayana Beevi O. M. S^{1*}, Dr. Sukanya B. Menon²

ABSTRACT

During the lockdown, children and teens have abundant access to the Internet and mobile phones, and most of the time they lead to YouTube passions and characters who want to stay indoors. Parents with their girl children approach a psychologist when they spend time listening to the BTS album all day and the academic grades reflect the consequences. Cases of BTS addiction have come to the forefront of psychological counseling among adolescents and youth was the stimulus that made researchers explore the relationship between the dependent nature of K-pop YouTube videos and adolescent lives. The study relies on data collected through a Semi-Structured Interview from a group of K-Pop viewers from Kerala. The collected data were thematically coded and analyzed quantitatively. The findings and suggestions derived from this study may open a new avenue for understanding adolescent behaviours and the phenomenon of K-pop addiction in the present context of virtual learning.

Keywords: *K-Pop, BTS Army, Lockdown, Adolescents, Family Interaction, Academic Performance*

BTS or Bangtan Sonyeondan (Bulletproof Boy Scouts) is a seven-member Korean musical band. The idol group was the first to make an entry in the U.S chart toppers and their popularity has only been on the rise from then on. BTS fans go by the title of ARMY. The K-pop BTS don't just sing or dance or rap, they perform (Dodson, 2020). That's how K-pop groups are perfectly made, different talents from the members are put together to perform the perfect performance from singing, dancing, rapping even they have members that are good at playing music instruments, write a song, entertainer and looking good by just breathing (StudyHippo.com). The group members are not just random people that got put to perform together. They were trained for years and by training means practicing every single day from singing to dancing to language, and the practicing keep going as they have to come up with different choreography for each song (Agatep et al., 2014). BTS is known for their extremely diverse fan base that ranges from as young as children aged 8 or below to people over 60 or 70 in age (Sharma, 2021).

¹Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Prajyoti Niketan College, Pudukad, Thrissur, India

²Asst. Professor, Department of Psychology, Prajyoti Niketan College, Pudukad, Thrissur, India

*Corresponding Author

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Music has some amazing effects on humans. One of the most important functions of music is to create a feeling of cohesion or social connectedness. To enjoy the music of life in the right way, we need to have good relationships with those around us. One of the most important of these is our relationship with our society and members of our family. Family life is an important condition forming the basis for the advanced development of a child (Dumrique & Castillo, 2018). Therefore, we considered it important and useful to explore the changes that involve the function of the family and its structure and the nature of interpersonal relations between family members (Chaia, Chenb & Khoo, 2011).

Adolescence as a period of transition from childhood to maturity is the most dynamic period in the life of an individual. The behaviour model that children adopt within their families and through the relationship with their parents will be significant for all other relationships they will form in their future lives (Jancee, 2011). Knowledge about the adverse influence of K-pop BTS addictive behaviours on human relationships of adolescents and youth was the stimulus that made the researcher explore the relation between the dependent nature of K-pop BTS YouTube videos and adolescent lives.

Need and Significance

During the lockdown, children and teens have abundant access to the Internet and mobile phones, and most of the time they lead to YouTube passions and characters who want to stay indoors. When learning online, children choose a variety of entertainments instead of focusing on class. K -pop delusion is seen in girls as much as online gaming in boys. Although children have been involved in such activities in the past, it is clear that the excessive admiration of adolescents for the Korean music band BTS has increased during online learning and thereby they show indifference towards their studies and family relationships. Parents with their children approach a psychologist when they spend time listening to the BTS videos all day and the grades reflect the consequences.

The clients usually ask in counselling sessions “How do I forget BTS while studying?” “I don’t know why they are always on my mind and I stay distracted and cannot focus on studying. How do I stop this obsession?” etc. The purpose of this paper is to present to you a new problem that is being looked at through psychological counselling in adolescents during the lockdown.

Objectives

- To understand the nature of BTS addiction among girls during lockdown
- To study the consequences of K-pop addiction among BTS Army students
- To sort out the reasons behind excessive K-pop admiration
- To find out the preventive measures of BTS addiction

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted an explorative pattern through descriptive and clinical observation methods with some attempts to intervene into BTS addictive behaviour. For that, the investigators used methods like passive and participant observations of social media posts and responses of youth, and discussions with BTS passionate adolescents regarding the concern of the band. A total of 53 female adolescents (age ranges between 12 to 19 years) and their parents as participants included in this study, selected through snowball sampling. Data was collected by assuring confidentiality. The data collected were descriptive in nature. Major themes of the content were derived and percentage analyses were done.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The present study's main objective was to explore adolescents' excessive admiration for the Korean music band BTS and thereby the indifference that they show towards their studies and family relationships. The interview was embedded with vast information. Investigators mainly focused on expressive BTS addictive behaviours, reasons behind attraction to the specific band, and ways to withdraw from this specific addiction. The thematically coded responses were analyzed and discussed below under three headings.

Expressive addictive behaviours of BTS fans

The investigator interviewed and discussed with parents of the participants by enquiring about their Children's involvement in K-pop YouTube videos. Different behaviours were identified and analyzed. Herewith discuss the identified behaviours in BTS addicted cases:

- BTS Obsessive Adolescents search for things about the team and know everything about them such as What is their profile, what is their favourites, and what are they like to do. Also able to understand their inside jokes that only ARMYs understand.
- Form Army groups in social media and engage huge time there during online classes. Update stories with BTS pictures and show euphoric expressions when any of the band members see their story on Instagram. At the same time seen as panic when BTS has a Twitter update. A parent said that *“she will hurriedly open her Twitter account to check on BTS updates like there's no tomorrow”*.
- They are obsessed with the colour purple as the music group loves it. They say *“I purple you”* (borahe) instead of I Love You.
- There are so many videos available on YouTube. An addicted person spends more and more time on BTS-related things to know them better. Seeing one after the other seems to pass the time and it can cause a lot of procrastination in academic and personal matters.
- They are not interested in people who do not belong to BTS Army and refuse to play, interact and outings with them.
- Unbeknownst to the parents, these children take their money and spend it on buying and using a lot of physical merchandise like BTS notebooks or pens to school, a lot of BTS pictures around while studying, BTS posters, photo cards, albums, bags, shirt, cap, and any other merchandises which are really expensive because of shipping from Korea. Few parents opined that *“Children put pressure on their parents to buy such items without thinking about the price which cannot afford for parents”*.
- They can't last a day without seeing them and get so wrecked even if they are doing nothing. A mother told that *“95% of her phone gallery is BTS as she saves all pictures of BTS she sees on social media and wallpapers & mobile themes of them are set accordingly on gadgets”*.
- Can't take them away from the mind or can't focus on the things they are doing because they can't stop thinking of them and feel that all they see or hear is always related to them. These crazy fans are being emotional when hearing them sing and cry when see their idols cry. If someone criticizes and talks about the band, they become angry and argue with them a lot.
- Never gets tired or bored of listening to their songs again and again and always singing and memorize their songs on head like a pro. No other programs will be played on TV or allowed to be viewed by others in the family. A father said about his child that *“she knows each of their song's choreography and can identify any BTS choreography even with no song being heard”*.

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- One of the positive behaviour observed is that learning Korean so that they will not again be focusing more on subtitles just to understand the songs. Also learning ‘hangul’ - the official writing system in Korea - to communicate with them when they have a chance (imagine).
- Also, parents complain that children watch these YouTube videos forgetting to take care of their personal hygiene and are hesitant in talking to their family. They imitate their favourite stars in dressing, makeup, look etc. They Wear hoodies even though it is not suitable for the Kerala climate. They want to be as thin and fit as them. Such obsession can lead to eating disorders and depression.

Reasons behind attraction to the specific band

To find the answer to the question ‘What influences the adolescents to become BTS addicted?’, the researcher interviewed the BTS Army adolescent groups. Analyzing the cases, investigators assume some of the causes which lead to BTS addictive behaviour among adolescents.

- *Attractiveness in Music:* Children are influenced by the theme, tune and words of their songs. They enjoy songs that address the kind of freedom that teens want.
- *Attractiveness in Appearance:* The cuteness of BTS celebrities, girls-like makeup and multi-colored hairstyles also attract them to BTS videos.
- *Attractiveness in Backstories:* The back stories of the BTS players, their life background, the paths they took, etc. lead the children to develop sympathy for them. And that sympathy also leads to celebrity adoration.
- *Attractiveness in Beauty:* They are handsome with good makeup and cuteness for Korean people in general. Girls love that beauty too.
- *Attractiveness in Fame:* The awards & achievements won by BTS.
- *Attractiveness in Blames:* Actors have the blame for being like women in the name of voice and appearance. Such blaming is bringing children closer to them.
- *Attractiveness in Trends:* The latest trends they introduce.
- *Attractiveness in Lifestyle:* When seven people put their dormitory life together as a video on YouTube, the children fully trust and enjoy it so that they can get to know their personal life better and not understand the commercial interests behind it.
- *Attractiveness in Social media posts:* The humorous narration and laughter of BTS on social media make the viewers funny, curious and interested. The girls enjoy shopping and teasing each other.
- *Attractiveness in Philosophy:* The concepts of self-love and self-realization put forward by BTS are a big reason. They are inspired by those songs.
- *Attractiveness in Fan service:* BTS band members interact with fans via social media and mention their gratitude to their followers in song lines.
- *Attractiveness in Talent:* BTS releases albums that combine not only song but also good dance, games and jokes with the song. Therefore, the viewers get a good visual treat.
- *Crowd effect – law of grouping:* When everyone around says and talks about BTS, many adolescents start watching BTS albums to join the group or crowd and then set aside a good portion of the day for five to eight hours daily to enjoy it.

Ways to regulate or withdraw from this specific addiction

From clinical experiences as well as interviews with the participants identified some ways to regulate the obsessive interest in the musical group and thereby adolescents can follow some modifications in their lifestyle.

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- Unfollow the band on social media and all of their accounts.
- To stop from going over them, delete all their pictures/videos from devices.
- If keeping their merchandise; pack/ put/ give them away
- Start listening to mainstream music and give their music a break & it really found help.
- And, get into a new hobby like reading, playing a sport, etc. thereby have much more time for self that way. So for the only way to get out is to find a new interest. But if one would keep watching and listening to K-pop, it would be hard to get rid of it. Especially if every day someone reads news about idols, follows them on Instagram and Twitter and the likes, it would be hard for them to lose interest.
- Avoid the tendency to know each and every single detail about them i.e. birthday, birthplace, zodiac sign, height, weight, blood group etc. All these will only increase the feeling to know more and can lead to becoming a follower.
- Try focusing on your work more and control your mind from drifting away.

“The only way to get over someone is to go under someone else”.

In this present study, adolescents commented that K-pop BTS helps them to cope up with the world, teach them to start loving themselves the way they are, development of mental stability, go on with adjusting and fight over the criticism and off course a good piece of music. It helps them bond with their friends and satisfies the need for belongingness. At the same time regardless of its genre, is beneficial for adolescents also. If simply considering the music, it's a stress-relieving hobby, and viewers can benefit from it. We cannot tell children to listen to classics, and completely avoid pop culture. They are allowed to choose the musical style that they like.

Here is not exaggerating the problems of music and preventing children from enjoying K-pop. Rather it should be taught to enjoy being regulated. Even though they enjoy K-pops or music; they want to know how to limit themselves and the need to control themselves in order to function well, socialize well, nurture humanity. Also, the absence of in-person interaction may lead to alienation in life and dehumanize people by interacting only with the virtual figures in gadgets. The level of family interaction among adolescents excessively using the electronic gadget is not adequate (Jennifer, 2012). Baron (2010) studied the effect of technology on people's inter personal and family relationships found that technology have allowed adolescents to be more autonomous from their parents and they are less interested in having face-to-face interactions and it is impacting the social lives of children.

Excessive indulgence of children in entertainments like K-pop will cause them to lag behind in learning and they will not be able to achieve great success in academics. Studies found that the level of academic performance among adolescents excessively using electronic gadgets is lower than their counterparts (Jennifer, 2012). The majority of the children who watch television excessively have deleterious effects on learning and academic performance (Dorey et al., 2010). Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS) and the Media Awareness Network (2001) found that watching television takes time away from reading and schoolwork and affects a Child's developmental level.

In today's world of online learning, adults need to pay close attention to children's ways of entertainment and knowledge. Because internet usage among advantaged groups of students includes searching for information and academic brilliance. At the same time, people from

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less-advantaged groups may lack those basic internet literacy skills and they prefer entertainment more on the Internet instead. Many students think that the internet means WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube and so on. Children who do not know much about it will be limited to the entertainment available on the internet such as K-pop BTS, films, TikToks, trolls, food vlogs, pubg and free fire games, etc. This is not to say that they should not enjoy it. On the contrary, they should be able to enjoy entertainment in moderation as well as advance their knowledge using the opportunities available at the academic level on the Internet. Children must not only consume the knowledge of others but also grow to the level of imparting knowledge.

CONCLUSION

During the lockdown, adolescent girls were found to be fascinated by BTS videos on a large scale. Such children exhibit a variety of behavioral changes that can adversely affect their normal life. Most children spend a lot of time watching BTS videos because of their obsession with the external characteristics of the band members. When children go to extremes of entertainment, adults need to guide them appropriately and enable them to become regulated viewers. Otherwise, it can affect their personal life, social life and academic life. There is already exists a “digital divide” and the student’s focus only on entertainment will only increase the digital divide. If e-learning is the ‘new normal’, it is the exact time to bridge the digital divide gap.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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