

Internet Addiction and Psychological Well-Being in College Students: A Clinical Concern

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ABSTRACT

Internet usage has been integrated into college students' lives for learning and social purposes. However, excessive internet use can also be linked to addiction, commonly referred to as Internet Addiction. Internet Addiction is prevalent among college going students. Studies reveal that IA can negatively affect the mental health of an individual. However, there is a lack of researches investigating the impact of IA on the well-being of college going students. Present study aims to investigate the association between Internet Addiction and psychological well-being of college students. The study was conducted on 120 college students of India aged between 18-25 years. Out of 120, 79 were female and 41 were male participants. To measure the IA and psychological well-being, Internet Addiction Test developed by Dr. Young and Psychological Well-being Scale by Carol D. Ryff (2007) were used respectively. A significant negative association was found between Internet addiction and psychological well-being ($r = -0.21$, $P < 0.05$). Excessive use of internet or high Internet addiction can lead to poor psychological well-being.

Keywords: *Internet addiction, Physical addiction, Behavioral addiction, Bipolar disorder, Suicide, Psychological well-being, College students, Depression*

Internet usage has been integrated into college students' daily lives for learning and social purposes. In the last decade, the large availability of the internet and the embracing of new digital technologies like smartphones are changing people's way of life and introducing new social dynamics. Social networks allow immediate communication with just one click, by searching, researching and sending any kind of verbal messages, videos or images. However, excessive internet use can also be pathological and addictive, commonly referred to as "Internet Addiction (IA)." Thus, the use of social networks has facilitated virtual contacts and meetings with the other people, replacing many personal relationships and commitments.

Addiction can be understood as a strong and habitual want that significantly reduces control and leads to significant harm (The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Psychiatry). An addiction is a chronic dysfunction of the brain system that involves reward, motivation, and memory. It is about the way the body craves a substance or behavior, especially if it causes a compulsive or obsessive pursuit of "reward" and lack of concern over consequences.

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Addiction can be either physical or behavioral. There are a few commonly recognized types of addiction such as tobacco and alcohol but there are actually hundreds of medically and significantly recognized addictions.

Physical Addictions

These are addictions to substances that are ingested or otherwise put into a person's body. Some common physical addictions are alcohol, tobacco, opioids, prescription drugs, cocaine, marijuana, amphetamines, hallucinogens, inhalants, PCP etc.

Behavioral Addictions

The type of addiction where a person becomes dependent on the pleasurable feeling that comes as a result of certain behaviors and begins to compulsively act on that behavior. Most common behavioral addictions are food addiction, internet addiction, using computers and/or cell phones, gambling addiction, exercise, sex addiction, pornography addiction, work addiction, seeking pain etc.

Now that we have brief information about what addiction is, we will try to understand internet as an addiction. Internet addiction is an umbrella term that refers to the compulsive need to spend a great deal of time on the internet, to the point where relationships, work and health are allowed to suffer. Internet addiction is when a person has a compulsive need to spend a huge amount of time on the internet, to the point where other areas of life such as work performance, lifestyle, relationships, sleep pattern, socialization gets negatively affected. The person grows dependent on the internet to achieve the same feeling as pleasure or satisfaction. Further, internet addiction can be categorized as,

- ***Sex-*** The person uses internet to look at, download or swap pornography or to engage in casual cybersex with other users.
- ***Relationships-*** The person uses chat rooms to form online relationships at the expense of spending time with real-life family and friends. This can also include cyber adultery.
- ***Games-*** This can include spending excessive amounts of time playing games, gambling, shopping or trading.
- ***Information-*** The user obsessively searches for and collects information.
- ***Social networking addiction-*** This includes the desire for constantly monitoring social networking sites such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter etc. This majorly involves constantly updating profiles, posts, and checking messages to inform friends of what one is doing at the moment.

College students have been documented to be particularly vulnerable to internet addiction, given the psychological and developmental characteristics of late adolescence and easy access to the internet (Kendell,1998). Like patients with substance abuse disorder, excessive internet users are affected by core symptoms of addictions such as salience, tolerance and interpersonal conflict (Griffiths, 2000).

Well-being, also known as wellness or quality of life, refers to what is intrinsically valuable relative to someone. So the well-being of a person is what is ultimately good for the person, what is in the self-interest of this person (Wikipedia). Psychological well-being is quite similar to other terms that refer to positive mental states, such as happiness or satisfaction. Psychological well-being has two important facets. The first of these refers to the extent to which people experience positive emotions and feelings of happiness. Sometimes this aspect

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of psychological well-being is referred to as subjective well-being (Deiner, 2000). Psychological well-being is defined as one's level of psychological happiness/health, encompassing life satisfaction and the feeling of accomplishment. This encompasses the person's perspective on life, including not only the perceptions of physical health but also of self-esteem, self-efficacy, relationships with others and satisfaction with life.

Numerous studies have demonstrated harmful health effects of Internet addiction across different aspects of health. First, physical health could be affected because internet addiction is often associated with a number of unhealthy lifestyles, including poor diet, physical inactivity, migraine, headache, sleep pattern disrupts, drinking behavior and late-night internet use. Further, internet as an addiction can have several deleterious effects on the psychological health of adolescents. Intemperate use of internet can lead to lower self-confidence, unrealistic expectations, interpersonal problems often ending in bipolar disorder, depression and even suicide. Internet addiction has also been found to be related to lower life satisfaction with family, friends, school and living environment.

Internet addiction has been regarded as one of the most serious public health issues around the globe, particularly in South Korea, and China's government has even enacted laws to regulate adolescent internet use behavior (Block, 2008). Research among adolescents and youths, including college students, has also found that their prevalence of internet addiction ranged from 5.9% to 26.8%. Based on the research on Meta- analysis done by Joseph, et al. wide variations were observed in the individual studies on Internet addiction's prevalence among males ranging from 2.2% to 67.7% and females ranging from 3.3% to 43.8%. The present work aims at studying the prevalence of Internet addiction among college students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Joseph et al., in 2021 did a study on the prevalence of internet addiction among college students in the Indian setting. Methodologies used in the research are Young Internet Addiction Test (Y-IAT), pooled prevalence was estimated using the Fixed-effects model, publication bias was evaluated using Egger's Test and visual inspection of the symmetry in funnel plots. The results estimated the prevalence of IA as 19.9% and 40.7% based on the (Y-IAT). The Nationally Representative data suggests that about 20% to 40% of college students in India are at risk for Internet addiction.

Yen et al., in 2018 did a comparative study between substance use and psychiatric symptoms in adolescents with internet addiction. The methodologies used were the Brief Symptom Inventory, Chen Internet Addiction Scale, Questionnaire for Experience of Substance use. The result shows a prevalence rate of Internet addiction and substance use at 20.8% and 9.2% respectively. Results demonstrated that adolescents with Internet addiction have higher scores in GSI (Global Severity Index), PST (Positive Symptom Total), PSDI (Positive Symptom Distress Index) and all dimensions. Further examination indicated that adolescents with internet addiction had higher level of hostility, depression, phobic anxiety and a lower level of anxiety, greater somatization.

A Prospective Study by Chou et al., aimed at predicting effects of psychological Inflexibility/experiential avoidance and stress coping strategies for internet addiction was done in 2018. The methodologies used were The Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II, the 52-item self-administered COPE (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced), Chen Internet Addiction Scale containing 26 items, Beck's Depression Inventory-II and (Kiddie-SADS-E). The results obtained indicated that high PI/EA at the initial assessment increased

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the risk of Internet addiction, addiction, significant depression, and suicidality at the follow-up assessment.

Jang et al. published his study on Internet addiction and psychiatric symptoms among Korean adolescents in 2018. Methodologies used were the Internet related addiction scale and the symptom checklist a multivariate logistic regression analysis. The results showed that the students having longer hours of internet use were significantly associated with intermittent addiction. When the demographic and internet-related factors were controlled, obsessive-compulsive and depressive symptoms were found to be independently associated factors for intermittent addiction and addiction to the internet, respectively.

Anand et al., in 2018 published his work on Internet use patterns, internet addiction and psychological distress among engineering students. The number of participants were 1086 engineering undergraduates aged between 18-21 years. Tools used for the study were Semi-structured Schedule, Internet Addiction Test which is a 20-item self-report scale based on 5-point Likert scale to assess internet addiction and Self-reporting Questionnaire developed by WHO. The result of the study indicated that psychological distress and Internet Addiction were positively correlated which means that psychological well-being and Internet addiction are negatively correlated.

Onyemaechi et al. in 2022 published his study on internet addiction and its psychological correlate. A total of 232 undergrad students served as the sample out of which 85 were male and 147 were female aged between 17-30 years. Methodologies used were Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale (1989), short version of Young's Internet Addiction Test (1998). The result of the statistical analysis of the data obtained indicated that internet addiction had a significant relationship with psychological well-being.

Krishnamurthy et al., in 2015 did a study on the prevalence and risk factors of internet addiction. The aim of the study was to estimate prevalence, understand patterns, and evaluate risk factors for Internet addiction among college students in the city of Bengaluru, India. Out of a total of 554 data samples from eight colleges selected through multistage cluster sampling, 515 samples were analyzed. Young's 20-item Internet Addiction Test (IAT), an inventory including demographic factors and patterns of internet use, was administered. The findings provide explanations on the addictive behavior of the internet users, the risk of "internet addiction" is emerging as a significant behavioral addiction pandemic to be tackled worldwide. Internet addiction in adolescence can have a negative impact on identity formation and may negatively affect cognitive functioning, lead to poor academic performance and engagement in risky activities, and inculcate poor dietary habit.

A research was conducted by Chern et al., in 2018 on the association between internet addiction and lower health-related quality of life among college students. Undergraduate students aged 18 years or older were recruited from 2 of the largest comprehensive universities in Taiwan. Data from 1439 college students were included in the analyses. The tools used in the test are Chen Internet Addiction Scale and World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL-BREF). The study demonstrated that college students with IA had significantly lower HRQOL (Health-related quality of life) in physical, psychological, social, and environment domains. Further, specific IA manifestations, such as compulsivity, interpersonal and health problems, and time management problems, were linked to lower HRQOL in different domains.

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A research was conducted by CJR and Sewall in 2020 on how psycho-social well-being and usage amount predict inaccuracies in retrospective estimates of digital technology use. Methodology used in the research is the measure of estimated iPhone usage, depression, loneliness, life satisfaction. The result of this research was that psychological well-being variables indicate that depression was negatively associated with discrepancy score for both overall and SM use.

Nath et al., in 2016 did a study on the prevalence, risk factors, and ill effects of internet addiction among medical students in Northeastern India. A total of 188 medical students from Silchar Medical College and Hospital (Silchar, Assam, India) filled out a socio-demographic form and an Internet use questionnaire. Out of 188 medical students, 46.8% participants were at increased risk of internet addiction. It was found that the ill effects of internet addiction include withdrawal from real life relationships, deterioration in academic activities and a depressed and nervous mood.

METHOD

Venue: Present study was conducted among college going students of India. Data for the study was collected from school or college going students from different states of India.

Sample: Present study was conducted on 120 college going students of India. Out of 120, 79 were female and 41 were male participants. Study participant's age ranged between 18-25 with a majority of participants being unmarried (112) and the remaining (8) being married. Most of the participants belonged to a rural background. The participants were fluent in their ability to read, write, and comprehend English and/or Hindi and consented for the study.

Tools

- **Internet Addiction Test (Y-IAT) (Young et al., 1996):** It is a 20-item self-report scale developed by Dr. Kimberly S. Young, based on a 5-point Likert scale to assess the level of Internet addiction and its severity. Response options for the test are 0 = not applicable, 1 = rarely, 2 = occasionally, 3 = frequently, 4 = often, and 5 = always. The validity of the IAT has shown strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.90-0.93$) and good test-retest reliability ($r = 0.85$) values (7-12).
- **Psychological well-being scale (Ryff et al., 2007):** The 42-item Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) Scale, developed by psychologist Carol D. Ryff, measures six aspects of wellbeing and happiness: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. The response format is 1 = strongly agree; 2 = somewhat agree; 3 = a little agree; 4 = neither agree nor disagree; 5 = a little disagree; 6 = somewhat disagree; 7 = strongly disagree. The test-retest reliability coefficient of PWBS was 0.82. The subscales of Self-acceptance, Positive Relation with Others, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth were found to be 0.71, 0.77, 0.78, 0.77, 0.70, and 0.78 respectively.

Procedure

To ensure the identification and selection of samples appropriate for the test, purposive sampling was employed. After this a google form was created and shared with the participants. The researcher in process directed the respondents on how to attend to the questions properly.

Statistical Analysis

Scoring was done after all the responses were received and the data was analyzed. All the data was analyzed using data descriptive analysis and correlation analysis. Pearson correlation method was used to determine the strength of negative liner relationship between IA and Psychological well-being.

RESULT

Sample Characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample population and the mean of IA and well-being are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

Demographic Variables		Frequency/ Mean
Gender	Male	41
	Female	79
Age		18-25
Marital Status	Married	08
	Unmarried	112
Residence	Rural	65
	Urban	55
Internet Addiction		39.96
Well-being		134.63

The study sample (N=120) comprised of college going students of which 41 were male and 79 were female participants. The age of the study sample ranged from 18-25 years. A majority of participants were unmarried (112) and married (8). Approximately half of the sample size (54.17%) came from a rural background and (45.83%) belonged from an urban background. The present study findings revealed that the mean value of internet addiction and psychological well-being in the sample participants was 39.96 and 134.63 respectively.

Table 2. Correlation Table

N (sample size)	r (value of correlation)	Significance level	df
120	-0.21	P<0.05	118

From the table (2) above it can be seen that there is significant negative correlation between Internet Addiction and Psychological well-being at 0.05 level. Since the relation is negative in nature, it implies that higher Internet Addiction can lead to poor or lower psychological well-being.

DISCUSSION

The emergence of internet does not only to have a positive influence on the users but is also associated with negative effects on the health. The lack of awareness on the effect of IA on the physical and psychological well-being is only leading the way to adversity. The present study was conducted to examine the level of Internet addiction and psychological well-being among college going students. Findings of the study reveal that there is a strong negative association between internet addiction and psychological well-being. This establishes the fact that longer duration of internet use or internet addiction will reduce the well-being of the user. Decreased well-being also includes in it reduced concentration, lower self-confidence, unrealistic expectations, interpersonal problem. Other symptoms involve

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Bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, insomnia, vision problem, losing sense of time, loss of productivity, isolation, procrastination etc.

When we get on social media, we are looking for affirmation, and consciously or not, we are comparing our life to the lives of others. As a result, we may not enjoy what's in the moment, rather, get wrapped up in comparison. This reduces the self-esteem, confidence, negative attitude towards self, sense of inferiority. All of this eventually develops into a much severers problem such as depression or anxiety.

The result of the present test is in line with the results obtained by (Anand et al., 2018 & Onyemaechi et al., 2022). Certain factors like friends, family environment, community and attitude may have a role to play in the internet addiction and psychological well-being.

The study has examined the correlation between the level of internet addiction and psychological well-being among the sample participants. The study concludes that there is a significant negative correlation between Internet addiction and psychological well-being. This implies that the level of well-being will decrease as the number of hours spent on the internet and/or the reliability on the internet increases. Internet addiction appears to be a significant emerging mental health condition among university engineering students in India.

Psychological distress (depressive symptoms) and Internet addiction is found to be positively correlated and it is an emerging issue of concern. As already mentioned, IA can lead to severe deleterious health hazards. They can be psychological and physiological such as weak eyesight, body ache, migraine, muscle twitches, boredom, isolation, anger issues, low self-esteem, procrastination, impulsiveness, depression, bipolar disorder, and even suicidality.

Limitations

The present study has a few limitations which have been mentioned below,

- The sample size is small. Hence, the result can not be generalized
- The age range of the sample population is 18-25. Hence, the result obtained can not be applied to the students of all age group.
- Sample for the study were from India only. Hence, the study result is not applicable for students in other countries.
- The mode of data collection was through a survey questionnaire. This leaves room for frivolous responses by the participants.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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