

Research Paper

A Comparative Study of Internet Addiction Between Rural and Urban School-going Adolescents of West Bengal

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ABSTRACT

Background – Life without the internet is unimaginable, particularly for Generation Z and Generation Alpha. In the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI), almost every aspect of our lives depends on the internet, whether it is academics, entertainment, shopping, banking, or traveling. School-going adolescents are silently becoming addicted to the internet before their guardians even realize it, until its ill effects become predominant. It has been established that excessive use of the internet increases physical comorbidities like obesity as well as psychological disorders, along with mental and social issues. Problematic Internet Use (PIU) has now been included as a mental health problem by DSM-IV. **Objectives** – The purpose of the present research was to estimate and compare the internet addiction patterns of school-going adolescents in rural and urban West Bengal and compare the two. **Methods**– A cross-sectional study was conducted in June and July 2025 among school-going adolescents aged 14 to 18 years, using cluster sampling. Data were collected using a pretested and standardized Young's Internet Addiction Test (IAT) questionnaire and were analysed using SPSS. **Results** –The total number of students was 207, out of which 108 were from rural schools of Purba Bardhaman district and 99 were from urban schools of Kolkata district of West Bengal. Overall, 44.4% of the school-going adolescents are addicted to the internet. Out of 108 rural adolescents, 28.7% are addicted to the internet, and out of 99 urban adolescents, 61.6% are addicted to the internet. Urban adolescents have a higher mean internet addiction score (35.41 ± 16.11) than the rural (20.73 ± 1.66) adolescents and the difference is statistically significant ($F= 1.855, p=.000$). Majority of the rural students, (75% (82/108)) belong to low socio-economic status, while majority of the urban population belongs to middle socio-economic status, 88 % (88/99). Average internet use in rural adolescents was within 1 to 3 hrs in 78 % (84/107) cases, while average internet use in urban adolescents was 3 to 6 hrs in 39% (39/99), in comparison to 15 % (17/107) rural adolescents using it for the same duration. In both rural and urban areas, the device used for internet access was a mobile phone (96/107 in rural and 89/99 in urban). Overall, the majority of the adolescents (44.5%) used the internet for online gaming, followed by academics (15.9%) and social networks (12.1%). The lower socioeconomic classes have lower internet addiction scores than the higher classes, and it is statistically significant (Chi-square value 23.314, $p=.025$). **Conclusion**– The prevalence of Internet Addiction among school-going adolescents is increasing day by day, both in rural and urban West Bengal, irrespective of socioeconomic status. Easy accessibility to a mobile

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A Comparative Study of Internet Addiction Between Rural and Urban School-going Adolescents of West Bengal

phone could be the main reason. Efforts to raise awareness, involve the different stakeholders, and educate the school-going adolescents about media literacy are the need of the hour.

Keywords: *Internet Addiction, School-Going Children, Adolescent Addiction, Mobile Addiction*

The Internet is an indispensable part of our lives, whether in education, social, or personal fields. The COVID-19 pandemic has hugely changed our lifestyle¹. After COVID-19, worldwide internet use has increased from 3.67 billion in June 2016², to 5.52 billion, which is 67.5 % of the worldwide population. In the case of India, the figure increased from 460 million in 2016 to 881.3 million in January 2025. India holds the second-highest number of internet users globally, only after China³. According to the latest census of India in 2013, among 190 million internet users of India, 130 million belong to urban areas and 60 million belong to rural India⁴. But the latest data of 2024 shows a changing trend with 55% of 488 million users from rural India⁵. Women contribute to 58% of rural internet users. Mobile is the dominant means of internet use in rural and urban India.

Nowadays, life without the internet is unimaginable, and students are too much internet users. As Adolescence is a period of transition, they are more prone to addiction to the internet, like any other addictive substance. Internet addiction is defined as “a very strong desire or urge for using the internet”⁶. Despite the enormous benefits of internet use, excessive use by young people is not hazard-free. The concept of ‘problematic internet use’ or ‘internet addiction’ was termed as early as 1996 by Kimberly S Young⁷. It has already been established that excessive use of the internet leads to addictive behaviour and that leads to mental health issues, particularly in young adults⁸. It is associated with high levels of comorbidity of mental health like depression, anxiety, stress, and behavioural issues, and they are more prone to internet addiction⁹. Such problems become grave when the person is not engaged with normal social life, disharmonious family life, poor academic consequences^{10,11} etc. There is a lack of data regarding internet addiction among adolescents and young adults in West Bengal. There is also unclear knowledge of internet addiction in rural and urban Bengal school-going adolescents.

Objectives

General Objectives: To estimate and compare the internet addiction pattern of school-going adolescents of urban and rural areas of WB, and provide a need-based recommendation to overcome the problem.

Specific Objectives

- To describe the socio-demographic condition of the study subjects.
- To estimate the internet addiction pattern of school-going adolescents in rural areas of WB.
- To estimate the internet addiction pattern of school-going adolescents in urban areas of WB.
- To compare the same between the two groups.
- To provide a need-based recommendation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design & Study population

A cross-sectional study was conducted among students in July 2025 after ethics clearance.

A Comparative Study of Internet Addiction Between Rural and Urban School-going Adolescents of West Bengal

Inclusion and exclusion criteria - school-going adolescent students who were present on the day and gave their ascent for the study were included. Those students who were absent on the day and those who did not give their ascent. Those who have had a known psychiatric or mental illness were also excluded from the study. Parental consent was also taken.

Sample size calculation and sampling technique

The sample size for the study was determined using the formula $4PQ/d^2$, where P represents the prevalence of internet addiction in adolescents, Q is (100-P), and d is the allowable error. The prevalence of internet addiction among Indian adolescents is 24.6% in a recent study¹². The estimated sample size was 188. We were targeting to approach 200 and collected data from 209. The type of sample used was a cluster sampling. We took samples from urban and rural schools of West Bengal. To compare rural and urban students, one government school from Kolkata, Tiljala High School, and one government school from Purba Barddhaman district, Ajhapur High School, were selected randomly after listing all the available schools in those areas. From each school, students from classes 8 to 11 were randomly chosen after fulfilling the inclusion criteria.

Data collection

The adolescent students of the different classes from the selected schools were assembled in a hall and were informed about the purpose of the study. Rapport was built up with the participants. A briefing was given to the participants regarding the questionnaire provided to them and how to answer it. The questionnaire contained socio-demographic data and Young's Internet Addiction Test (IAT). Young's IAT is a 20-item 5-point Likert scale, with scores ranging from 0 to 100. It consists of six psychometric properties, viz., salience, excessive use, neglecting work, anticipation, lack of self-control, and neglecting social life. A score of 0 to 39 is considered normal, 40 to 59 is mild addiction, 60 to 79 is moderate addiction, and 80 to 100 is severe addiction. The Young's IAT showed a very good internal consistency, and the reliability for the six subscales was found to be adequate^{7,10}.

Data analysis

The collected data were scored according to the correct responses to the questions. The total correct answers were then computed to calculate individual scores. The collected data was entered with coding in Microsoft version 10. The entered data was cleaned and checked for any missing data. The data was then analysed in SPSS version 25. The descriptive analysis was calculated with the help of Mean and SD for continuous data and Frequency and Percentage for categorical data. The association between different socio-demographic variables and internet addiction was calculated by Chi-Square and Odds Ratio. The comparison between rural and urban was calculated by an unpaired t-test. The p-value was set at $p=0.05$.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the distribution of study participants according to their current class of study. Out of the 108 rural school-going students, 19 (17.5%) were in class 8, 30(27.7%) were in class 9, 27(25%) were in class 10 and 32(29.6) were in class 11. Out of the 99 urban school-going students, 21(21.2%) were in class 8, 21(21.2%) were in class 9, and 57(57.6%) were in class 11. No students from class 10 were present on that day.

A Comparative Study of Internet Addiction Between Rural and Urban School-going Adolescents of West Bengal

Table 1 Distribution of study participants according to their present class of study (n=207)

Class of study	Rural	Urban	Total
8	19	21	40
9	30	21	51
10	27	-	27
11	32	57	89
Total	108	99	207

Table 2 shows the mean age of adolescents in rural and urban participants is 14.50 ± 1.18 in the rural school and 15.71 ± 1.47 in the urban school.

Table 2 Comparison of the Mean and SD of age among the rural and urban adolescents (n=207)

Types of adolescents	Mean	Standard Deviation
Rural	14.50	1.18
Urban	15.71	1.47

Figure 1 presents the distribution of study participants by the types of gadgets used, using a multiple-bar diagram. In rural areas, 89 use mobile phones, 6 use a laptop, and 4 use a desktop for internet access. In urban areas, 96 use mobiles, 10 use a laptop, and 2 use a desktop. The device used for internet access was a mobile phone, 96 out of 107 in rural areas and 89 out of 99 in urban areas.

Figure 1 Multiple frequency bar diagram showing distribution of study participants based on their types of gadgets used (n=207)

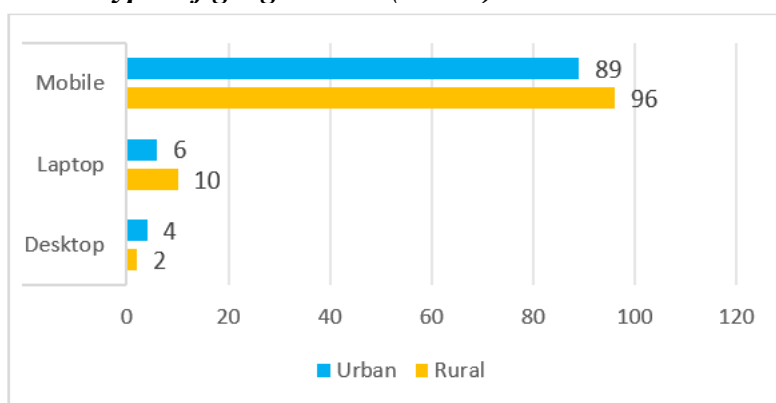


Figure 2 shows the distribution of the internet addiction pattern among the adolescents. Overall, 55.6% subjects did not have any addiction 44.4% adolescents have internet addiction. 32.9% had mild addiction, and 11.6% had moderate addiction. None of the subjects had severe addiction.

A Comparative Study of Internet Addiction Between Rural and Urban School-going Adolescents of West Bengal

Figure 2 Pie diagram showing distribution of overall internet addiction pattern among the adolescents (n=207)

Overall	Frequency	Percent
No Addiction	115	55.6
Mild Addiction	68	32.9
Moderate Addiction	24	11.6
Total	207	100.0

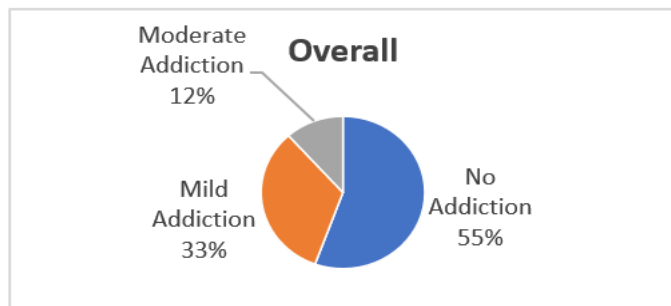


Figure 3 shows the distribution of internet addiction patterns among rural adolescents. In the rural area, 71.3% subjects did not have any addiction, and 28.7% had internet addiction. 21.3% had mild and 7.4% had moderate addiction.

Figure 3 Pie diagram showing the distribution of internet addiction patterns among rural adolescents (n=108)

Rural	Frequency	Percent
No Addiction	77	71.3
Mild Addiction	23	21.3
Moderate Addiction	8	7.4
Total	108	100.0

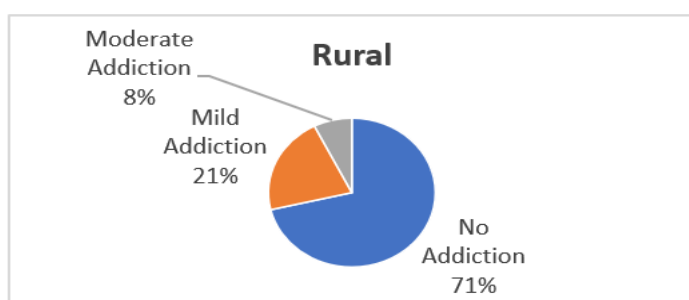


Figure 4 shows the distribution of internet addiction patterns among urban adolescents. In urban area, 38.4% subjects did not have any addiction. 45.5% had mild and 16.2% had moderate addiction.

Figure 4: Pie diagram showing distribution of internet addiction pattern among urban adolescents (n=99)

Urban	Frequency	Percent
No Addiction	38	38.4
Mild Addiction	45	45.5
Moderate Addiction	16	16.1
Total	99	100.0

A Comparative Study of Internet Addiction Between Rural and Urban School-going Adolescents of West Bengal

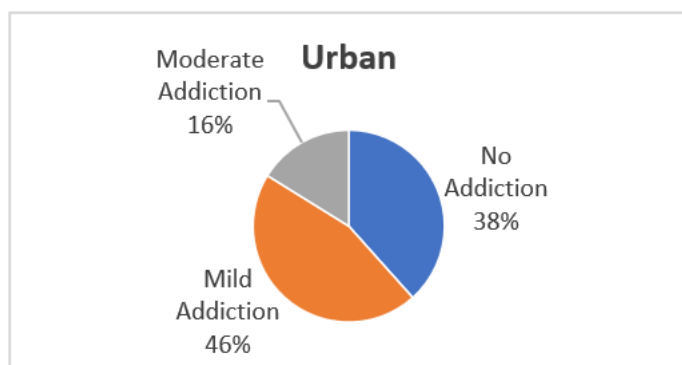


Table 4 shows the distribution of the internet addiction score among the rural and urban adolescents. In a rural area, the internet addiction score is 20.73 ± 17.326 , while in an urban area, the score is 35.41 ± 16.117 .

Table 4 Distribution of internet addiction score among the rural and urban adolescents (n=207)

	Type of School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total Score	Rural school	108	20.73	17.326	1.667
	Urban School	99	35.41	16.117	1.620

Figure 5 shows a comparison of internet addiction scores among the rural and urban adolescents by histograms.

Figure 5 Comparison of histograms showing internet addiction scores among the rural and urban adolescents (n=207)

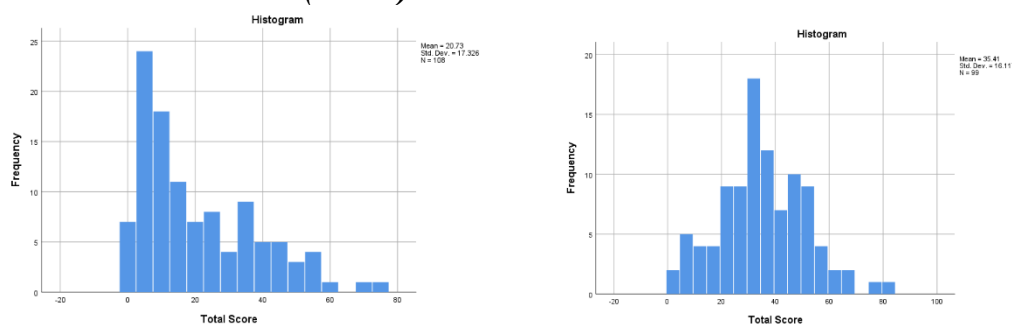


Table 5 presents the differences in the mean scores of internet addiction between the two adolescent groups using the unpaired t-test. Urban adolescents have a higher mean internet addiction score than rural. The difference is statistically significant ($F=1.855$, $p=.000$)

A Comparative Study of Internet Addiction Between Rural and Urban School-going Adolescents of West Bengal

Table 5 Unpaired t-test showing the differences in the mean score of internet addiction among the two groups of adolescents (n=207)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Total Score	Equal variances assumed	1.85	.17	-	205	.000	-14.683	2.332	-	-
		5	5	6.297					19.280	10.085
Total Score	Equal variances not assumed			-	204.95	.000	-14.683	2.325	-	-
				6.316	3				19.266	10.100

Figure 6 shows the distribution of grades of the internet-addiction score among the rural and urban adolescents. Urban adolescents have higher grades of internet addiction than rural adolescents.

Figure 6 Percentage multiple bar diagram showing distribution of the grades of internet addiction score among the two groups of adolescents (n=207)

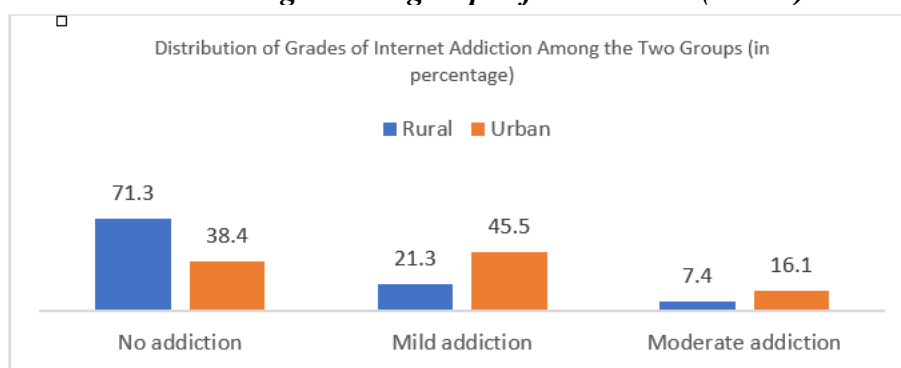


Table 6 shows the association between grades of internet addiction scores and the classes of students. The lower classes have lower internet addiction scores than the higher classes, and it is statistically significant (Chi-square value is 12.24, p=.05)

Table 6 Association between grades of internet addiction score and the classes they study (n=207)

Class	No addiction	Mild addiction	Moderate addiction
8	20	16	4
9	35	14	2
10	10	10	7
11	50	28	11
Total	115	68	24

A Comparative Study of Internet Addiction Between Rural and Urban School-going Adolescents of West Bengal

Figure 7 presents a multiple-frequency bar diagram showing the distribution of study participants based on their daily average internet usage. In rural areas, out of 108, 84(77%) use the internet for 1 to 3 hours, 17(15.7%) use the internet for 3 to 6 hours, 6(5.5%) use the internet for 6 to 9 hours, and 1(.9%) use the internet for 9-12 hours daily. In urban areas, out of 99, 40(40%) use the internet for 1 to 3 hours, 39(39%) use the internet for 3 to 6 hours, 6(6%) use the internet for 6 to 9 hours, and 4(4%) use the internet for 9 to 12 hours.

Figure 7 Multiple frequency bar diagram showing distribution of study participants based on their daily average internet usage (n=207)

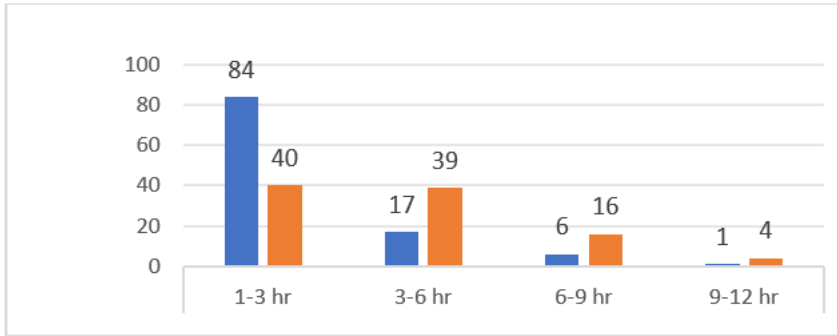


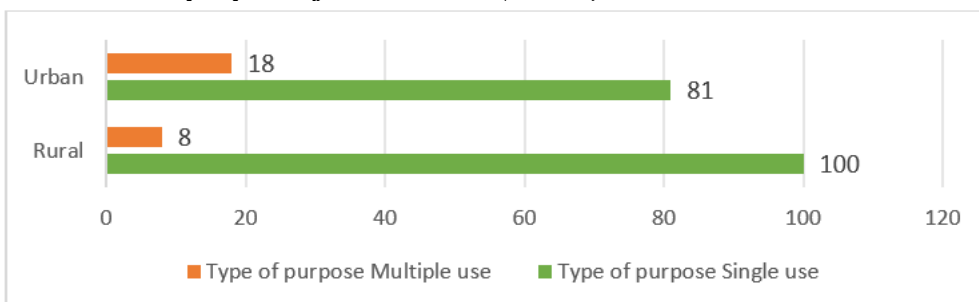
Table 7 shows the association between grades of internet addiction and the duration of daily average internet use. The daily lesser usage of the internet gives significant protection against the development of the internet addiction score. (Chi square value 100.122, p=.000.)

Table 7 Association between grades of internet addiction score and the duration of daily average internet use (n=207)

Duration of daily average internet use	No addiction	Mild addiction	Moderate addiction
1-3 hrs	92	26	6
3-6 hrs	17	31	8
6-9 hrs	3	10	9
9-12 hrs	3	1	0
Total	115	68	23

Figure 8 shows the distribution of the study participants based on their purpose of using the internet. The majority of the students, both in rural and urban areas, use the internet for a single purpose rather than multiple purposes.

Figure 8 Multiple frequency bar diagram showing distribution of the study participants based on their purpose of internet use (n=207)



A Comparative Study of Internet Addiction Between Rural and Urban School-going Adolescents of West Bengal

Figure 9 shows the distribution of study participants based on their different purposes of internet usage among the single-purpose users. The majority of the students used the internet for gaming (44.5%), followed by social networking (17%), academics (15.9%), and media files (10.4%).

Figure 9 Distribution of study participants based on their different purposes of internet usage among those who used the internet for a single purpose (n=182)

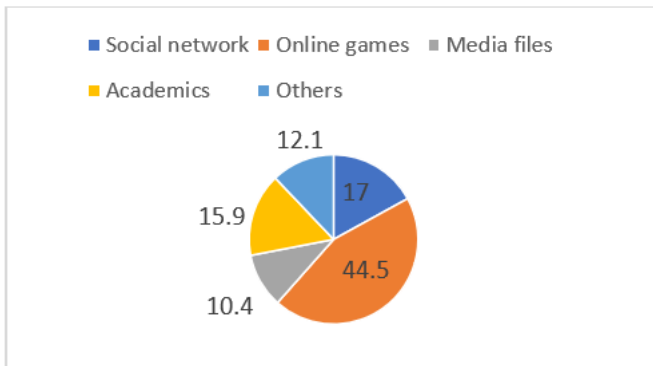


Figure 10 shows the distribution of study participants based on the predominant timing of internet use in a week. The majority of study subjects use the internet daily.

Figure 10 Multiple frequency bar diagram showing distribution of study participants based on the predominant timing of internet use in a week (n=207)

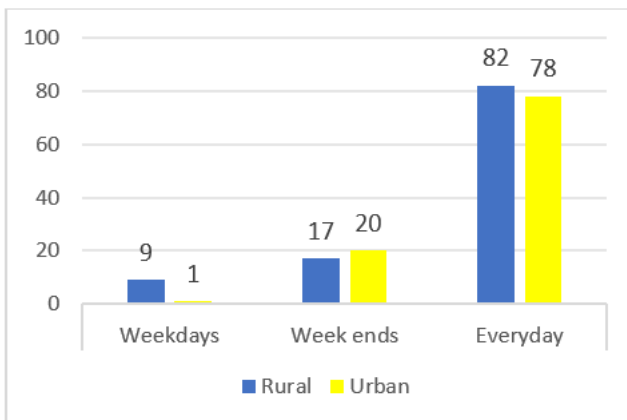


Table 8 illustrates the association between grades of internet addiction score and the timing of internet use. The adolescents who use the internet only on weekdays, in comparison to those who use it on weekends or every day, provide significant protection against the development of internet addiction score. (Chi square value 212.86, p=.000.)

Table 8 Association between grades of internet addiction score and the timing of internet use (n=207)

Time of Internet use	No addiction	Mild addiction	Moderate addiction
Only Weekdays	4	4	1
Only Weekends	27	8	2
Everyday	84	56	20
Total	115	68	23

A Comparative Study of Internet Addiction Between Rural and Urban School-going Adolescents of West Bengal

Table 9 shows the distribution of study participants based on their socioeconomic status. Out of 108 rural students, 82 (75.9%) belong to low socioeconomic status, 24 (22.2%) belong to middle socioeconomic status, and 2 (1.8%) belong to high socioeconomic status. Out of 99 urban students, 6 (6%) belong to low socioeconomic status, 88 (88.8%) belong to middle socioeconomic status, and 5 (5%) belong to high socioeconomic status.

Table 9 Distribution of study participants based on their socioeconomic status (n=207)

Socio-Economic Status	Rural	Urban	Total
Low	82	6	88
Middle	24	88	112
High	2	5	7
Total	108	99	207

DISCUSSION

In our study, we found that overall, 44.4% of school-going adolescents in West Bengal are addicted to the internet. Out of 108 rural adolescents, 28.7% are addicted to the internet, and out of 99 urban adolescents, 61.6% are addicted to the internet. In the pre-COVID era, the prevalence of internet addiction in different regions of India was comparatively low. It was as low as 0.3% in Jabalpur, 3% in Bhavnagar in 2019¹³, 8.7% in Vadodara in 2016¹⁴, and 35.6% in Aligarh in 2017¹⁵. The rate was exceptionally higher, 58.87% among medical students in Maharashtra in 2015¹⁶. Data on internet addiction in West Bengal in the pre-COVID era is not available so far.

In the post-COVID era, Khan *et al.*¹⁷ observed a high prevalence of 51.3% of internet addiction among school-going adolescents of South Delhi. Our findings corroborate the findings of South Delhi. Khan *et al.* concluded that the higher prevalence of internet addiction in their study was the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, students had increased access to the internet, which led to addictive behaviours¹⁸. A multicentric study in 2021 showed that as high as 67.6% of COVID-19 diagnosed patients had internet addiction¹⁹.

The prevalence of internet addiction among school and college students has increased significantly within India and abroad after the COVID-19 pandemic, both in rural and urban areas. In our study, we found that urban adolescents have a higher mean internet addiction score (35.41 ± 16.11) than the rural (20.73 ± 1.66) adolescents. The difference is statistically significant ($F = 1.855$, $p = .000$). Novonil *et al.*²⁰ in their study in 2022 observed a mean value of internet addiction of 50.64 ± 7.64 in first-year medical students.

We also showed that the lower classes of school had lower internet addiction scores than the higher classes. The difference is statistically significant. Bhatu *et al.*²¹ showed in their study that the mean of the internet addiction score of students studying in higher secondary school is 46.70, and the mean of the internet addiction score of students studying in secondary school is 38.50, with a significant difference. He also concluded that there is a significant difference in the effect of internet addiction among students studying in secondary and higher secondary schools. But Khan.S.*et al.*¹⁷ in their study in South Delhi school found that students who belonged to high school in comparison to a senior secondary school were more addicted, and that was similar to a study from Nepal by Karmacharyal *et al.*²².

A Comparative Study of Internet Addiction Between Rural and Urban School-going Adolescents of West Bengal

The mobile phone was the predominant mode of internet access in both urban and rural areas, irrespective of socioeconomic status. India has 1.05 billion mobile phone internet users as of 2024²³. According to the latest data of 2024, over 96% of the global digital population uses a mobile phone to connect to the internet. Global users spent almost 60 % of their online time browsing the web from their mobile phones.

Bhatia *et al.*²⁴ in their study found that more than half of the students (60.33%) were spending less than 2 hours online, which is similar to our finding of 77% of students use internet for 1-3 hours in rural. But in the urban area, there is a rising tendency to use the internet for a longer time. Grover *et al.*²⁵ in their study showed that the most commonly endorsed items were the need to use the internet every day. In our study, we also found that two-thirds of the adolescent students use the internet on every day and adolescents who use the internet during weekdays, in comparison to those who use it on weekends or every day, provide significant protection against the development of internet addiction score.

Agarwal *et al.*²⁶ pointed out that more than 90% adolescents use the internet for playing online games, watching, and downloading videos/TV shows/movies. We also found that nearly half of the students use the internet for online gaming.

Novonil and Poulomi, in their study in 2022, assessed the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on internet addiction in West Bengal and showed that a significantly small positive relationship exists between internet addiction and other psychological parameters like anxiety-stress, depression²⁰. Yadav *et al.*¹⁴ in their study among high school students in Ahmedabad found a strong positive correlation between internet addiction and depression, anxiety, and stress disorders. Though in our study, we did not measure other psychological parameters, it is quite rational that those who have internet addiction could also have other psychological disorders.

CONCLUSION

The prevalence of internet addiction among school-going adolescents of West Bengal is high both in rural and urban areas. It is more prevalent in urban areas and positively correlates with higher class in school, more hours of internet use, and everyday internet use. Mobile phone is the predominant tool for using the internet, and the majority of adolescents use the internet for online gaming. Establishing media literacy, school-based counselling, and emphasizing physical activity are the needs of the hour.

Limitation

One limitation of the study is that data were collected through self-reported responses, which are subject to recall bias and social desirability bias. Participants may have underreported or overreported certain responses due to stigma or a desire to provide socially acceptable answers, which could potentially affect the accuracy of the results.

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A Comparative Study of Internet Addiction Between Rural and Urban School-going Adolescents of West Bengal

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A Comparative Study of Internet Addiction Between Rural and Urban School-going Adolescents of West Bengal

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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