

Research Paper

Self-Esteem and Internet Addiction Among Adolescents Aged 18–25 Years in Chennai: A Preliminary Study

Anitha Yazhini D.^{1*}, Aju Simon Sudhakar²

ABSTRACT

The internet has become an integral part of everyday life, particularly for young people, and its increasing use has raised concerns about its possible effects on psychological well-being. The present study examined the relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction among college students aged 18 to 25 years in Chennai. Thirty students participated in the study and completed Young's Internet Addiction Test and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale through an online survey. The data were analysed using SPSS, and Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between the two variables. The results showed a weak negative correlation between self-esteem and internet addiction, $r(28) = -.27$, $p = .149$. The correlation was not statistically significant at the .05 level. Although the direction of the relationship was consistent with findings reported in several previous studies, the present results do not provide sufficient evidence of a significant association in this sample. The findings highlight the need for studies with larger and more diverse samples to examine the relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction among young people in the Indian context.

Keywords: *Self-Esteem, Internet Addiction, Adolescents, Chennai*

The internet has become an important part of everyday life. For young people, it is used for education, communication, entertainment, social interaction, and access to information. While these uses provide many benefits, excessive or problematic internet use has also received increasing attention because of its possible effects on psychological and social functioning. One factor that has been considered in relation to problematic internet use is self-esteem.

Rosenberg (1965) described self-esteem as an individual's overall evaluation of their own worth. Self-esteem develops over time and is influenced by experiences during childhood, adolescence, and later stages of life. Adolescence and early adulthood are particularly important periods for the development of self-concept and self-esteem because individuals continue to develop their identities and become increasingly influenced by peers and social relationships. Experiences in online environments may also contribute to how young people view themselves and their relationships with others.

¹Asst. Prof., Loyola College, Chennai, India

²Asst. Prof., Loyola College, Chennai, India

*Corresponding Author

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The period between late adolescence and early adulthood can involve several challenges. In the Indian context, young people may experience academic pressure, expectations from family, changes in social relationships, and increasing independence. College students may also have greater freedom in their use of digital technology. These factors may influence patterns of internet use and may also have implications for self-esteem. However, relatively limited research has examined the relationship between these two variables among young people in India, particularly within the Chennai context.

Internet addiction, also referred to in some literature as problematic internet use, involves excessive or poorly controlled internet use that may interfere with an individual's daily functioning. Such difficulties may include problems with sleep, academic performance, relationships, mood, and time management (Griffiths, 2000; Kuss, 2012). Internet addiction has also been discussed in terms of behavioural addiction, with features such as salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse (Griffiths, 2005). Earlier literature has considered whether excessive internet use shares some characteristics with other forms of addictive behaviour (Holden, 2001; Widyanto & Griffiths, 2006).

The relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction can also be considered from the perspective of the sociometer hypothesis proposed by Leary et al. (1995). According to this perspective, self-esteem is related to an individual's perception of social acceptance and rejection. Individuals who experience difficulties in their interpersonal relationships may seek social connection or validation through online activities. The internet provides several opportunities for communication, social interaction, and participation in online communities. These opportunities may be particularly attractive to individuals who experience difficulties with social acceptance in their offline relationships.

Griffiths (2005) identified several components commonly associated with addictive behaviour, including salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. These components have been discussed in relation to problematic internet use and provide a framework for understanding excessive engagement with online activities.

Previous research has generally reported an association between lower self-esteem and greater internet addiction. However, much of the available research has been conducted in Western and East Asian populations. The social, cultural, and family contexts in India may differ from those in other countries and may influence patterns of internet use and self-esteem. Therefore, examining this relationship within an Indian sample may provide useful preliminary information.

The present study was undertaken to examine the relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction among college students aged 18 to 25 years in Chennai. As a preliminary study, it aims to contribute to the limited literature available on this relationship in the Indian context and provide a basis for further research with larger samples.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research examining self-esteem and internet addiction has generally reported a negative association between the two variables. Aydın and San (2011), in a study of adolescents in Turkey, reported that self-esteem was a significant negative predictor of internet addiction. Similarly, Ayas and Horzum (2013) found that lower self-esteem, along with loneliness and depression, was associated with greater internet addiction among adolescents.

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Other studies have examined factors that may occur alongside the relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction. Bahrainian et al. (2014) reported relationships between internet addiction, self-esteem, and depression among university students. Their findings suggested that low self-esteem and depressive symptoms were both associated with internet addiction.

Research involving adolescents has also considered the role of family and emotional factors. Shi et al. (2023) examined the association between family atmosphere and internet addiction among Chinese adolescents and reported that self-esteem and negative emotions played mediating roles. Kircaburun (2016) also found that self-esteem and daily internet use were related to depressive symptoms among Turkish adolescents. These findings suggest that internet addiction may occur together with other psychological and interpersonal difficulties rather than functioning as an isolated problem.

Social relationships and perceived support may also be relevant. Błachnio et al. (2019), in research involving participants from Italy and the United States, found relationships between Facebook intrusion, internet addiction, self-esteem, and life satisfaction. Weinstein et al. (2015) reported an association between internet addiction and social anxiety among young adults. Tian et al. (2021) found reciprocal associations among shyness, self-esteem, loneliness, depression, and internet addiction among Chinese adolescents. Their findings indicate that the relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction may be complex and may involve influences in both directions.

Research from India has also reported associations between the two variables. Batra (2020) found a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction among late adolescents and young adults. Joy (2023) reported a similar relationship. Sivaraman et al. (2021) examined internet addiction and self-esteem among college students, while Salunkhe et al. (2022) examined internet use in relation to anxiety, depression, stress, and self-esteem among young people. Mishra and Dangwal (2021) further examined perceived emotional support along with self-esteem and internet addiction and reported that greater emotional support was associated with higher self-esteem and lower internet addiction.

Cross-cultural findings have also provided support for a negative relationship between internet addiction and self-esteem. Seabra et al. (2017), in a study involving participants from Portugal and Brazil, reported a negative relationship between the two variables in both cultural groups, although the strength of the relationship differed between the samples.

Overall, previous research provides some evidence of a negative relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction. At the same time, the strength of this relationship may vary depending on the characteristics of the sample and the presence of other factors such as depression, loneliness, family environment, social anxiety, and perceived social support. There is relatively limited research focusing specifically on young people in the Indian context. The present study therefore examines this relationship among college students aged 18 to 25 years in Chennai.

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METHODOLOGY

Design and Sample

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. The sample consisted of 30 college students between 18 and 25 years of age who were residing in Chennai. Participants were recruited through simple random sampling and were approached online.

Hypothesis

- **H0:** There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction among adolescents aged 18 to 25 years in Chennai.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Participants were included if they were college students residing in Chennai and were between 18 and 25 years of age. Students who were outside the specified age range or who were not residing in Chennai were excluded from the study.

Measures

- **Young's Internet Addiction Test:** Young's Internet Addiction Test (Young, 1998) consists of 20 items designed to assess different aspects of problematic internet use, including psychological dependence, compulsive use, withdrawal symptoms, and difficulties related to academic work, sleep, family life, and time management. Each item is rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("always"). Total scores range from 20 to 100, with higher scores indicating greater levels of internet addiction.
- **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale:** The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item measure of global self-esteem. Items are rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scale contains both positively and negatively worded items and is widely used to assess an individual's overall sense of self-worth.

Procedure

Participants were approached online and were informed about the purpose and general procedure of the study. They were also informed about voluntary participation and confidentiality. Participants provided their responses to both measures after agreeing to participate. The responses were treated as anonymous and were used only for the purpose of the study. After data collection, the responses were scored and entered for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction scores. The analysis was conducted for the total sample of 30 participants.

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RESULTS

Table 1 Correlation Between Self-Esteem and Internet Addiction Scores (N = 30)

Variable	Self-Esteem	Internet Addiction
Self-Esteem	1	-.27
Internet Addiction	-.27	1
p (2-tailed)	—	.149
N	30	30

The analysis showed a weak negative correlation between self-esteem and internet addiction, $r(28) = -.27$, $p = .149$, $N = 30$. The relationship was not statistically significant at the .05 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained for the present sample. Although the direction of the correlation was negative, the result does not provide sufficient statistical evidence to conclude that self-esteem and internet addiction were significantly related among the participants in this study.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction among college students aged 18 to 25 years in Chennai. A weak negative correlation was observed between the two variables. However, the correlation did not reach statistical significance. Thus, the findings do not provide sufficient evidence of a significant relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction in the present sample.

The negative direction of the correlation is similar to findings reported in several previous studies. Aydın and San (2011) and Batra (2020), for example, reported negative relationships between self-esteem and internet addiction. Other studies have also reported associations between lower self-esteem and problematic internet use. The non-significant finding in the present study may partly be related to the small sample size. With only 30 participants, the study had limited statistical power to identify a modest association between the variables.

Previous research also indicates that self-esteem may be associated with several other psychological and social factors. Depression, anxiety, loneliness, and social anxiety have been reported in connection with problematic internet use and low self-esteem (Bahrainian et al., 2014; Kircaburun, 2016; Weinstein et al., 2015). Family environment and perceived social support have also been identified as relevant factors (Mishra & Dangwal, 2021; Shi et al., 2023). These variables were not examined in the present study and may have influenced the relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction.

The findings of Tian et al. (2021) are also relevant because their study suggested reciprocal relationships among self-esteem, loneliness, depression, and internet addiction. A cross-sectional study such as the present one cannot determine the direction of influence between self-esteem and internet addiction. It is therefore not possible to conclude whether lower self-esteem contributes to problematic internet use, whether problematic internet use affects self-esteem, or whether both are influenced by other variables.

The sociometer perspective may provide one possible explanation for the negative direction observed in the present study. Individuals who experience difficulties with social acceptance or interpersonal relationships may seek social interaction or validation through online

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activities (Leary et al., 1995). However, because the present study did not directly assess social acceptance, relationship quality, or online social behaviour, this interpretation remains tentative.

The findings should therefore be interpreted cautiously. The negative correlation observed in the present study is consistent with the direction reported in much of the previous literature, but its lack of statistical significance means that the present results cannot establish a significant relationship between the two variables in the wider population.

Limitations and Scope for Future Research

The study has several limitations. First, the sample consisted of only 30 participants, which limits the statistical power of the analysis. Second, the participants were drawn from a single city, and therefore the findings may not be generalisable to young people in other parts of India. Third, data were collected through an online approach, which may have resulted in sampling limitations.

The study examined only self-esteem and internet addiction. Future research could include additional variables such as depression, loneliness, anxiety, family support, social relationships, and perceived emotional support. Examining these factors together may provide a better understanding of the psychological and social factors associated with problematic internet use.

Future studies should also consider larger and more diverse samples involving participants from different educational institutions and geographical regions. Longitudinal research would be particularly useful because it could help determine whether changes in self-esteem are associated with later changes in internet addiction, whether internet use affects self-esteem over time, or whether the relationship is reciprocal.

CONCLUSION

The present preliminary study found a weak negative relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction among college students aged 18 to 25 years in Chennai. However, the relationship was not statistically significant. The direction of the finding is consistent with several previous studies, but the small sample size limits the conclusions that can be drawn. The findings provide preliminary information about the relationship between self-esteem and internet addiction among young people in the Chennai context. Further research using larger and more representative samples is needed to determine the nature and strength of this relationship. Future studies may also benefit from examining psychological, family, and social factors that could contribute to problematic internet use.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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