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Prevalence of Internet Addiction: A Brief Review

T. Barani ¹, R. Thamizselvi ²

¹ Professor cum Principal, Department of Child Health Nursing, Vivekanandha Nursing College,
Gopalankadai, Iyyankuttipalayam, Puducherry 605009

² Associate Professor, Department of Child Health Nursing, Vivekanandha Nursing College, Gopalankadai,
Iyyankuttipalayam, Puducherry 605009

Abstract:

Internet addiction, a growing concern within psychological and social health spheres, refers to excessive and maladaptive use of online platforms that impairs social, academic, and occupational functioning. Characterized by compulsive behaviors, such as gaming and social media overuse, Internet addiction has gained prominence, especially following the social restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which prompted increased reliance on digital communication and entertainment avenues. Research indicates that adolescents and young adults are particularly vulnerable, with factors such as lack of parental supervision and the intrinsic appeal of virtual interactions contributing to the problem. The interplay between pre-existing mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, compounded by social isolation, establishes a cyclical relationship that exacerbates Internet dependency. Effective interventions recommended include cognitive-behavioral therapies and parental guidance strategies aimed at fostering healthier usage patterns. Targeted educational programs that not only inform about potential harmful effects but also reaffirm real-life social engagement strategies are essential to combat Internet addiction. The necessity for comprehensive strategies integrating family, education, and mental health support is warranted to foster healthier digital engagement for future generations, paving the way for enhancing overall well-being in an increasingly connected world.

Keywords: Internet addiction, problematic Internet use, adolescents, mental health, interventions.

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INTRODUCTION:

Internet addiction, characterized by excessive use of the Internet to the detriment of daily functioning, has emerged as a significant concern in psychological and social health realms. This phenomenon, often referred to as problematic Internet use (PIU), encompasses a range of behaviors including excessive social media use, gaming, and exploration of online content that can disrupt personal, academic, and work life. Studies have documented the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in amplifying Internet addiction, noting an increase in reliance on digital platforms during social isolation periods, exacerbated by psychological stressors linked to the pandemic (Burkauskas et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021).

Many factors contribute to the prevalence of Internet addiction, particularly among adolescents and young adults. According to Yi and Li, college students are particularly susceptible due to greater Internet access without parental restrictions and a lifestyle that often includes substantial free time (Yi & Li, 2021). Parental guidance and restrictions have been shown to mitigate the risk of developing Internet addiction, as strict supervision creates boundaries for acceptable online engagement. Conversely, the absence of such interventions can lead to increased instances of addiction, illustrating the importance of familial influence on Internet usage behaviors (Auraningtyas et al., 2024).

From a psychological perspective, Internet addiction is often intertwined with mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression. Liu et al. note that chronic Internet use can lead to both psychological and social impairments, including feelings of loneliness and withdrawal from real-world interactions (Liu et al., 2023). Adolescents deeply immersed in Internet use may prefer virtual interactions over face-to-face engagement, resulting in strained relationships with family and peers. The situation can worsen as individuals experiencing mood disturbances might turn to the Internet as a coping mechanism, thereby perpetuating a cycle of addiction (Shan et al., 2021; Yusuf et al., 2020).

The underlying mechanisms of Internet addiction illustrate a complex interplay between individual characteristics and environmental stressors. Factors such as personal temperament, coping styles, peer dynamics, and the immediate gratification provided by online activities enhance the rates of PIU (Islam et al., 2023). The anonymity and interactivity offered by the Internet can create an environment that fosters addictive behaviors, as users can engage in compulsive actions without immediate repercussions. This raises concerns regarding the long-term psychological implications of Internet addiction, especially among young adults in formative life stages (Zeng et al., 2023).

Emerging research emphasizes intervention strategies aimed at mitigating Internet addiction. Cognitive-behavioral therapies and structured parental support systems are highlighted as effective measures to combat

excessive Internet use, promoting healthier online habits (Berberyan, 2021). Group interventions that address underlying psychological issues while providing tools for managing time spent online demonstrate promise in empirical settings. Additionally, enhancing communication skills and family functions may contribute to reduced instances of Internet dependence, suggesting that a holistic approach is beneficial in addressing this growing public health issue (Lestari, 2024).

Empirical evidence reveals alarming trends; studies have reported prevalence rates of Internet addiction significantly impacting youth populations, with studies indicating that a considerable segment of young adults engages in maladaptive Internet use (Alavi et al., 2021). In specific populations, such as medical students, distractions from the Internet can lead to significant academic burdens and mental distress, complicating their educational trajectories (Yıldız et al., 2022). This highlights the need for targeted educational programs that inform students about the potential consequences of indiscriminate Internet use and instruct them on maintaining balance.

SUMMARY:

In summary, while the digital age presents numerous advantages, it also harbors significant risks of addiction that require vigilant attention. The phenomenon of Internet addiction merits serious consideration from parents, educators, and mental health professionals. Interventions targeting youth particularly need to focus on promoting healthy behaviors and reinforcing the importance of real-life social interactions over virtual engagements. Collaborative efforts in research, education, and therapeutic practices will be crucial for counteracting the adverse effects of Internet addiction and fostering a healthier digital environment for future generations.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, Internet addiction represents a multifaceted and pervasive challenge within contemporary society, significantly impacting the emotional, social, and academic spheres of individuals, particularly among adolescents and young adults. The rise of digital technologies has transformed lifestyles, offering unprecedented access to information and virtual connectivity; however, this ease of access has also facilitated detrimental patterns of excessive online behavior. As evident through empirical studies, the psychological ramifications of Internet addiction include heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and social isolation, suggesting that this condition not only disrupts individual lives but also extends its adverse effects to family dynamics and social relationships.

The literature highlights that effective approaches to mitigate Internet addiction must encompass a multifaceted strategy that includes cognitive-behavioral interventions, parental guidance, and increased awareness of the potential risks associated with excessive Internet use. By fostering open communication between parents and

adolescents, alongside implementing educational programs targeted at promoting responsible digital citizenship, we can create a supportive environment that encourages healthier online habits. Furthermore, the societal stigma surrounding mental health can be addressed by normalizing conversations about Internet addiction as a legitimate public health concern that warrants attention and intervention.

Looking toward the future, ongoing research is vital to further understand the complexities of Internet addiction and its evolving nature in a rapidly changing digital landscape. Investigating the effects of emerging technologies, such as virtual reality and the effects of social media algorithms, on addictive behaviors will be critical in formulating adaptive strategies for prevention and treatment. Moreover, as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to shape global online behaviors, it is imperative for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers to collaborate in creating frameworks that not only tackle the existing challenges of Internet addiction but also proactively promote a balanced approach to technology use among all age groups.

Ultimately, the goal should be to cultivate a digital environment that prioritizes mental well-being and healthy social interactions, thereby empowering individuals to engage with technology in a constructive and fulfilling manner. By addressing Internet addiction in a holistic and collaborative manner, we can pave the way for a healthier future where technology serves as a tool for connection and enrichment, rather than a source of dependency and distress.

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