



**RELATIONSHIP OF INTERNET ADDICTION ON PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AMONG
YOUNG ADULTS**

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ABSTRACT

The usage of the internet has transformed modern life, profoundly altering how we communicate, work, and access information. With the proliferation of smart phones, tablets, and interconnected devices, people are more interconnected than ever before. Psychological distress, characterized by symptoms like stress and sadness, is a concerning issue in this digital age. A study involving 30 young adults aged 18-21 explores the link between internet addiction and psychological distress, revealing a significant positive correlation. These findings underscore the harmful consequences of excessive internet usage on mental well-being. Targeted interventions aimed at addressing internet addiction are crucial for promoting healthier online behaviors among adolescents and safeguarding their psychological health in an increasingly digital landscape. By understanding this correlation, researchers can further develop more

effective strategies for prevention and intervention, thereby offering better support systems to mitigate the negative impacts of internet addiction on adolescent mental health.

KEYWORDS: *Internet Addiction, Psychological Distress, Males, Females, Adults*

INTRODUCTION

When an individual consumes too much internet-related activities to a point where they start to ignore their day-to-day activities, this can be referred to as internet addiction. It may reveal itself in various forms such as in gaming addiction, social networking excess and general overuse of the internet. Psychological disorders cover the spectrum of symptoms; among them are anxiety, depression, stress, and self-esteem issues. Young adults experiencing mental distress may appear anxious, inactive or have difficulties in their academics. One of the key findings of the studies is a relationship between internet addiction and distress among young adults. Online habits that are excessive can make existing mental health problems even worse or contribute to new issues. The connection between the internet addiction and psychological distress is usually bidirectional, because each one of them can create and perfect the other. For instance, teenagers suffering from psychological struggles can go online to calm down, which, in the end, only develops their addiction and stress levels.

Young adults psychological suffering has been connected to internet addiction in several ways. Excessive internet use has been linked to high levels of psychopathology, including symptoms of stress, anxiety, aggression, depression, and interpersonal sensitivity, according to studies. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that internet addiction exacerbates various types of psychopathologies in teenagers, emphasizing its aggravating role in the emergence of psychological problems.

Furthermore, studies show that teenage emotional discomfort, including anxiety, tension, and depression, can be exacerbated by internet addiction, with a notable incidence of emotional distress among internet addicts. These results highlight how critical it is to address internet addiction as a possible

cause of teenage psychological distress and the need for treatments to lessen its detrimental effects on mental health. The National Library of Medicine defines internet addiction as Internet addiction is characterized by “excessive or poorly controlled preoccupations, urges or behaviors regarding computer use and internet access that led to impairment or distress.”

INTERNET ADDICTION

UC Davis Student Health and Counseling Services (2019) define Internet addiction as an “unhealthy behavior that interferes with and causes stress in one's personal, school, and/or work life. Like other addictions, compulsive Internet usage completely dictates a person's life, leading to a sense of despair and dependency on cyberspace.”

APA Dictionary of Psychology (2018) defines Internet addiction as a “behavioral pattern characterized by excessive or obsessive online and offline computer use that leads to distress and impairment.”

Rouse (2017) defines Internet addiction as “internet addiction is a mental condition characterized by excessive use of the internet, usually to the detriment of the user.” Greenfield (2000) defines Internet addiction as “the compulsive use of the internet that results in negative social, academic, financial, or work-related consequences.” Kimberly (1990) defined Internet addiction as “excessive or poorly controlled preoccupations, urges or behaviors regarding computer use and internet access that led to impairment or distress.” Goldberg (1990) defined Internet addiction as “an impulse control disorder that does not involve use of an intoxicating drug and is very similar to pathological gambling.”

PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

Belay et al. (2021) described psychological distress “generically as a condition of emotional suffering marked by symptoms of depression (e.g., lack of interest; sadness; desperateness) and anxiety

(e.g., restlessness; tense feelings). It is also characterized by additional somatic symptoms such as sleeplessness, headaches, and lack of energy, which are likely to vary among places.”

Young (2019) defines it as “a transient (not long-lasting) phenomenon that is associated with specific fluctuations with the eating pattern, headache, constipation, diarrhea, chronic pain, provoked to anger frequently, excessive tiredness, forgetfulness and memory problems, and no longer finding pleasure in sex.” It typically diminishes/ vanishes when either the individual adapts to the stressor, or the stressor is removed.

APA Dictionary of Psychology (2018) defines psychological distress as “painful mental and physical symptoms that are associated with normal fluctuations of mood in most people. In some cases, however, psychological distress may reflect common mental disorders, such as depressive and anxiety disorders.”

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) defines psychological distress as “an undifferentiated set of symptoms ranging from anxiety and depression symptoms to functional impairment, personality traits (confusing, troubling), and behavioral problems.”

Rationale of the Study

The study aims to explore the relationship between internet addiction and psychological distress among young adults, recognizing the pervasive influence of digital technology on youth mental health. By examining this relationship, the research seeks to uncover potential mechanisms underlying internet addiction's impact on psychological well-being, informing targeted interventions to mitigate its detrimental effects. Addressing the research gap surrounding the reciprocal nature of internet addiction and psychological distress will contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies to promote healthier internet habits and support adolescent mental health. Through increased awareness and tailored interventions, this study strives to foster resilience and well-being among adolescents navigating the challenges of internet addiction and psychological distress.

Research Gap

Relationship between internet addiction and psychological distress among young adults lies in the need to further explore the specific mechanisms underlying how internet addiction influences mental well-being in this age group. While existing literature highlights a strong positive correlation between excessive internet use and psychological distress, there is a lack of in-depth understanding of the factors that contribute to this relationship. Additionally, there is a need to investigate the long-term effects of internet addiction on young adults' mental health and the effectiveness of targeted interventions in mitigating these effects. By addressing these gaps, future research can provide valuable insights for developing evidence-based strategies to promote healthier internet habits and support young adults' well-being.

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study on the relationship between internet addiction and psychological distress among young adults.

Hypothesis

- There will be positive correlation between internet addiction and psychological distress among young adults. It is expected that higher levels of internet addiction will be associated with increased psychological distress symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, and stress.

Sample

A total sample of 30 young adults, both males and females of 18-21 years of age was collected from Delhi, NCR.

Measures

- ***The Internet Addiction Test (IAT):*** The Internet Addiction Test (IAT) was developed by Dr. Kimberly Young, a psychologist and professor at St. Bonaventure University, in the late 1990s. There are twenty statements in this questionnaire. After carefully reading every item, please indicate which response (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) best characterized you using the 5-point Likert scale. If two options seem to be equally applicable, select the option that most accurately sums up who you are.
- ***DASS-21:*** Depression anxiety stress scales-10 was developed by Professor Ronald P. C. Cox, who is an associated member of the University of New South Wales in Australia. The DASS refers to a set of self-report items that are formed to assess the extent to which people experience depressive, anxious, and arousal reaction states.

Procedure

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled through Offline, face to face mode. Each participant was thanked for their cooperation. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the participants.

Analysis of Data					
Table 1					
<i>Correlation Matrix for Internet Addiction and DASS-10</i>					
INTERNET ADDICTION		Pearson's r		—	
		df		—	
		p-value		—	
		N		—	

DASS-10		Pearson's r	0.574		—
		df	29		—
		p-value	< .001		—
		N	31		—

Discussion of Results

The correlation analysis between Internet addiction and DASS-10 indicates a statistically significant positive correlation between these two variables. The correlation coefficient (Pearson's r) of 0.574 suggests a moderate to strong positive relationship between Internet addiction and DASS-10 scores. The p-value being less than .001 further confirms the significance of this correlation, indicating that the observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by random chance.

This result implies that individuals with higher levels of Internet addiction tend to have higher scores on the DASS-10, which measures levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. The findings suggest a potential link between Internet addiction and poorer mental health outcomes, highlighting the importance of addressing Internet addiction as a potential risk factor for psychological distress.

McNicol and Thorsteinsson (2017) researched on paper titled “Internet addiction, psychological distress, and coping responses among adolescents and adults.” For adult’s internet addiction (IA) was mostly predicted by participation in online video games and sexual activity, low email use, high anxiety, and high avoidant coping. Adults with problematic Internet usage had more emotion and avoidance coping responses, whereas adolescents had higher rumination and worse self-care scores. Avoidance coping responses moderated the link between psychological discomfort and IA. These data may help doctors create therapies to address various characteristics related with IA.

Conclusion

In this study investigating the relationship between Internet addiction and psychological distress among young adults aged 18-21, a sample of 30 participants was analyzed. The results revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between Internet addiction and psychological distress, as indicated by a moderate to strong correlation coefficient of 0.574 ($p < .001$). This suggests that higher levels of Internet addiction were associated with increased levels of psychological distress among the adolescent participants. The significant positive correlation observed highlights the importance of addressing Internet addiction as a potential risk factor for heightened psychological distress in this age group. These results underscore the need for targeted interventions and preventive measures to mitigate the adverse effects of excessive Internet use on the mental well-being of adolescents. Further research is warranted to explore the underlying mechanisms of this relationship and to develop effective strategies for promoting healthy Internet usage habits and psychological well-being among adolescents.

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