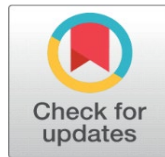
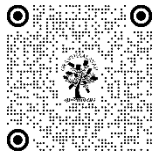


A STUDY OF INTERNET ADDICTION AMONG ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS

Dr. Md Aman Azeem ¹, Dr. Md Fahimuddin ², Dr. Karanam Mahaboob Vali ³

^{1,2,3} Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Aligarh Muslim University Centre Murshidabad, West Bengal, India



Corresponding Author

Dr. Md Aman Azeem,
maazeem@myamu.ac.in

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the phenomenon of internet addiction among adolescents and their behavioural patterns. Data for the study was gathered through in-depth interviews with five hundred seventy children, ages twelve to seventeen, who reported excessive internet use and its detrimental effects. The research design utilised in the study was qualitative. The data was analysed using the thematic analysis method to find themes and patterns about internet addiction and how it affects children's behaviour. The results showed that internet addiction among children in India is a growing concern and affects their behaviour patterns in several ways, including neglect of studies and physical activity, social isolation, anger issues, frustration, lack of respect towards elders, unrealistic dreams and demands, cyberbullying, and risky online behaviour, etc. The findings suggest increased awareness and education about the dangers of excessive internet use and support for adolescents and their families.

Keywords: Addiction, Phenomenon of Internet, Patterns

1. INTRODUCTION

The internet has become ubiquitous in modern life, and children are among the fastest-growing user groups. The internet can lead to addiction even if it offers a lot of advantages, such as entertainment, social relationships, and information access. According to Kuss and Griffiths (2012), internet addiction is characterised by excessive and unregulated internet use that harms social, academic, and psychological facets of life. "A compulsive, chronic, physiological or psychological need for a habit-forming substance, behaviour, or activity having harmful physical, psychological, or social effects and typically causing well-defined symptoms (such as anxiety, irritability, tremors, or nausea) upon withdrawal or abstinence: the state of being addicted" (Merriam-Webster). By any name, it is a compulsive behaviour that completely dominates the addict's life.

For some addicted to the internet, it takes precedence over friends, family, and employment. The internet takes on a central role in addicts' lives (Young, 2009). The phenomenon of internet addiction among adolescents is a growing

concern in India, where the number of internet users has increased significantly in recent years (Maheshwari & Sharma, 2018). Adolescents addicted to the Internet may spend excessive time online, neglecting their studies, physical activity, and other important aspects of life (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012). This can lead to poor academic performance, decreased motivation for learning, and social isolation (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012). Moreover, adolescents addicted to the internet are more likely to engage in risky online behaviour, such as exposing personal information, viewing inappropriate content, or interacting with strangers (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009).

Internet addiction is a growing concern not only in India but also worldwide. With the rise of technology and increasing internet use, children spend more time online, leading to various negative consequences. The internet has become an indispensable part of modern life, and children are no exception. In India, internet users have grown significantly in recent years, and children are among the fastest-growing user groups. While the internet provides many benefits, such as access to information, social connections, and entertainment, it can also be a source of addiction. Internet addiction is defined as excessive and uncontrolled internet use, leading to negative consequences in various aspects of life, such as social, academic, and psychological. Children are especially susceptible to internet addiction as they may lack the maturity and judgment to balance their online and offline activities. In India, internet addiction among children is increasing, affecting their behaviour patterns in several ways. For example, addicted children may spend excessive time online, neglecting their studies, physical activity, and other important aspects of life. This can lead to poor academic performance and decreased motivation for learning.

In terms of addiction, Griffiths (2011) claims that it is important in children and adolescents for a variety of reasons. In terms of developmental psychopathological findings, it appears that addictions have precursors during adolescence, and most dependencies develop in early adulthood. According to Wolfling & Muller (2009), peer pressure can lead to a variety of problems, including the development of pathological behaviours such as chemical and behavioural addictions. Bhatia, Rajpoot, & Dwivedi (2016) consider using computers and Internet education in schools as a menace. The easy access to social sites for adolescents needs to be controlled.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Internet addiction among children is a growing concern worldwide, including India. Several studies have explored the phenomenon of internet addiction and its effects on children's behaviour.

A study by Livingstone & Haddon (2009) found that the internet has become a central part of children's lives, leading to increased screen time and decreased physical activity. The study also found that the internet can harm children's relationships and social skills, as they spend less time interacting with others in person.

Kuss & Griffiths (2012) found that excessive internet use can lead to decreased academic performance, decreased motivation for learning, and social isolation. The study also found that children addicted to the internet are more likely to engage in risky online behaviour, such as exposing personal information, viewing inappropriate content, or interacting with strangers.

Garima & Suvidha (2016) found that it is difficult to determine the causes of internet addiction but excessive use of the internet showed some types of problems, like behaviour problems, familiar problems, academic problems, and psychological problems. Studies found that the major group of excessive use of the internet are adolescents age group 13 to 19 years old.

Zeinab Nemati Hossein Matlabi (2017) explained that with the rapid advancement of technology and the fact that one-third of the population uses the Internet in a moderate to severe manner, it seems imperative that students receive instruction on appropriate internet usage patterns. Additionally, given the observed positive correlation between a mother's educational attainment and her child's Internet addiction, raising mothers' health literacy levels can be a crucial first step in supporting the mental and physical well-being of teenagers.

Shraddha Jadhav (2017) found that young adults, especially teenagers, tend to be ignorant of how much time they spend on social media and how it could affect their ability to communicate with others and succeed academically. Studies have also noted that there may be a correlation between low self-esteem, social insufficiency, and social network addiction.

Sowndarya & Mounesh Pattar (2018) envisaged that early-stage internet addiction would turn it into a silent killer that affects millions of people, mostly kids and teenagers. Due to research showing negative effects on one's physical, emotional, and social well-being, excessive Internet use is becoming increasingly a public health concern.

Mayara de Rezende Machado et al (2018) revealed that there is a noteworthy incidence of internet addiction among teenagers, and there are no discernible variations based on the educational system attended by the individuals under investigation. Internet addiction is associated with several behavioural symptoms, including withdrawal, anxiety, depression, and social problems. It is also linked to issues with thought processes, attention spans, rule-breaking, and difficulties with extracurricular activities, academic performance, and interpersonal relationships.

A study by Parmar & Vyas (2019) found that excessive internet use among children in India is associated with various negative outcomes, including decreased academic performance, increased aggression, and decreased social skills. The study also found that internet addiction is more prevalent among boys than girls, and among children from urban areas compared to rural areas. A Study published in 2022 by NDTV Profit says that "Of the 8,238 responses received from parents with children aged 13 to 17 years, 71% said their children have access to a smartphone for all or most of the day. 55% parents with children between ages nine to 13, said their children had a smartphone available for nearly the full day". Overall, the literature suggests that internet addiction among children is a growing concern and has several negative effects on their behaviour, including decreased academic performance, decreased physical activity, social isolation, and risky online behaviour. These findings highlight the need for increased awareness and education about the dangers of excessive internet use and support for children and their families.

3. OBJECTIVE

This study aims to explore the internet addiction phenomenon among adolescents in India and their behavioural patterns, experiences of children who reported excessive internet use and associated negative consequences.

4. METHODS

The study used a qualitative research design, and data was collected through in-depth interviews with 570 children aged 12-17 who reported excessive internet use and associated negative consequences. The participants were selected through convenient sampling and recruited from various schools in urban and rural India.

The interviews were conducted in a private setting and lasted approximately 30-40 minutes each. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions related to the participant's experiences with internet use and its effects on their behaviour. Researchers interacted with some of the parents of the children on various occasions.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

The data were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data and identify patterns and themes related to internet addiction and its effects on children's behaviour. Three independent researchers conducted the analysis

6. RESULTS

The thematic analysis showed that internet addiction among children in India is a growing concern and affects their behavioural patterns in several ways. The main themes from the data are as follows;

Neglect of Studies and Physical Activity:

Many of the participants (23%) 131 reported spending excessive amounts of time online, neglecting their studies and physical activity. They reported feeling overwhelmed by the constant need to be connected and the desire to stay online for long periods, leading to decreased motivation for learning and decreased participation in physical activities. Some participants were unable to dissociate from internet surfing even during their meal time. If it is objected to by their parents, their food quantity either decreases or they take longer time to finish their meal. They have less concentration in their other work and on many occasions, they forget to complete their tasks. Forgetfulness becomes their easy excuse.

Social Isolation:

The participants reported (22%) 125 being isolated from their family and friends, as well as from the activities they once enjoyed, due to excessive internet use. They report their inability to concentrate on other activities or tasks assigned. Very often they lose their interest and are irritated when forced to complete the assignments. They reported feeling lonely and disconnected from the world.

Anger issues:

Children nowadays are raised in a fictitious world where they only believe things they read online. As a result, when they utilize the information in real life, they discover it is entirely false and differs greatly from the information provided. This causes them to feel ashamed as well as encounter numerous unexpected problems for which they are not ready. Due to the disconnect between the virtual and physical worlds, people have difficulties, lose their cool, and exhibit their unjustified rage in inappropriate situations. Present study reported that a large number of children (10%) 57 are having issues with their capacity to control their anger as well as an anger management disorder.

Depression:

Many of the respondents (8%) 46 claimed to feel depressed after spending a lot of time online. After using the virtual world for a while, people realize they are running out of time for other important tasks and feel depressed and hopeless. They feel happy at first, but as time goes on, they are left with little choice and end up feeling hopeless and despondent. When internet services are interrupted for any reason, people can experience depression and believe that their life is coming to an end.

Unusual sleep pattern:

Numerous participants (6%) 34 stated that extended and frequent usage of the internet has had a major impact on their sleep patterns. They are so dependent on the internet that even when they try to go to sleep, their thoughts are constantly focused on using the internet, and they have a strong desire to take a brief look at social media. According to their parents, occasionally children make hand gestures similar to those made when browsing the internet while they sleep. Additionally, several parents said that their children cried, behaved strangely when they slept, and repeated words from games, cartoons, movies, or anything else they had viewed online.

7. FRUSTRATION AND TEMPER TANTRUMS

The respondents (7%) 40 went on to say that when they can't access the internet on their phones or when their parents try to restrict their online time, they become frustrated and display strange behaviour patterns, including anger, fury, and temper tantrums.

Spread of fake information:

The respondents (4%) 23 also stated that they frequently get into difficulty because they believe the information they see online and apply it to their daily lives without doing any research. They also reported spreading this information inside their closed circles. They have also paid a heavy price for accepting false information.

Cyber fraud:

A few of the kids and their parents (2%) 12 claimed to have been the victims of online scams. Youngsters who engage in internet gaming are particularly vulnerable to these scams. Kids are being tricked by online betting apps as well. These scams also use fake e-commerce and dating websites. Some of the parents have reported that their children have made payments using their ATM cards, and they have also suffered significant losses due to cyber fraud.

Social comparison:

Kids believe that what they see on the internet can be tried on their own. Parents reported (4%) 23 that their children try to compare the lifestyles of others and force them (parents) to provide all the essentials required for that.

Unrealistic dreams and demands:

Not everything you find online is accurate. Sadly, the younger generation is ignoring this reality and accepting the extraordinary truths of the internet as fact. These emotions sometimes become so embedded in their actions that they perceive no harm in fulfilling their desires and goals. They experience a sense of hero worship and attempt to emulate their role models as best they can, which puts a lot of strain on both their parents and themselves. There have been incidents when parents have described how their children have become so fixated on having a toned body that they have

stopped eating ordinary, healthful meals because it is not supported by their roles. Additionally, many (3%) 17 believe that the internet is the sole and easy medium available to them for achieving success and fame.

Lack of respect towards elders:

Morality is a dying breed these days. There are numerous occasions where kids treat seniors with no respect. Their way of life is based on my life my rules. Parents (4%) 23 who have observed this issue in their children have also mentioned that the children disregard the advice of their elders and think it is outdated. They aggressively dispute their points and try to force their will on elders over insignificant matters.

Cyberbullying:

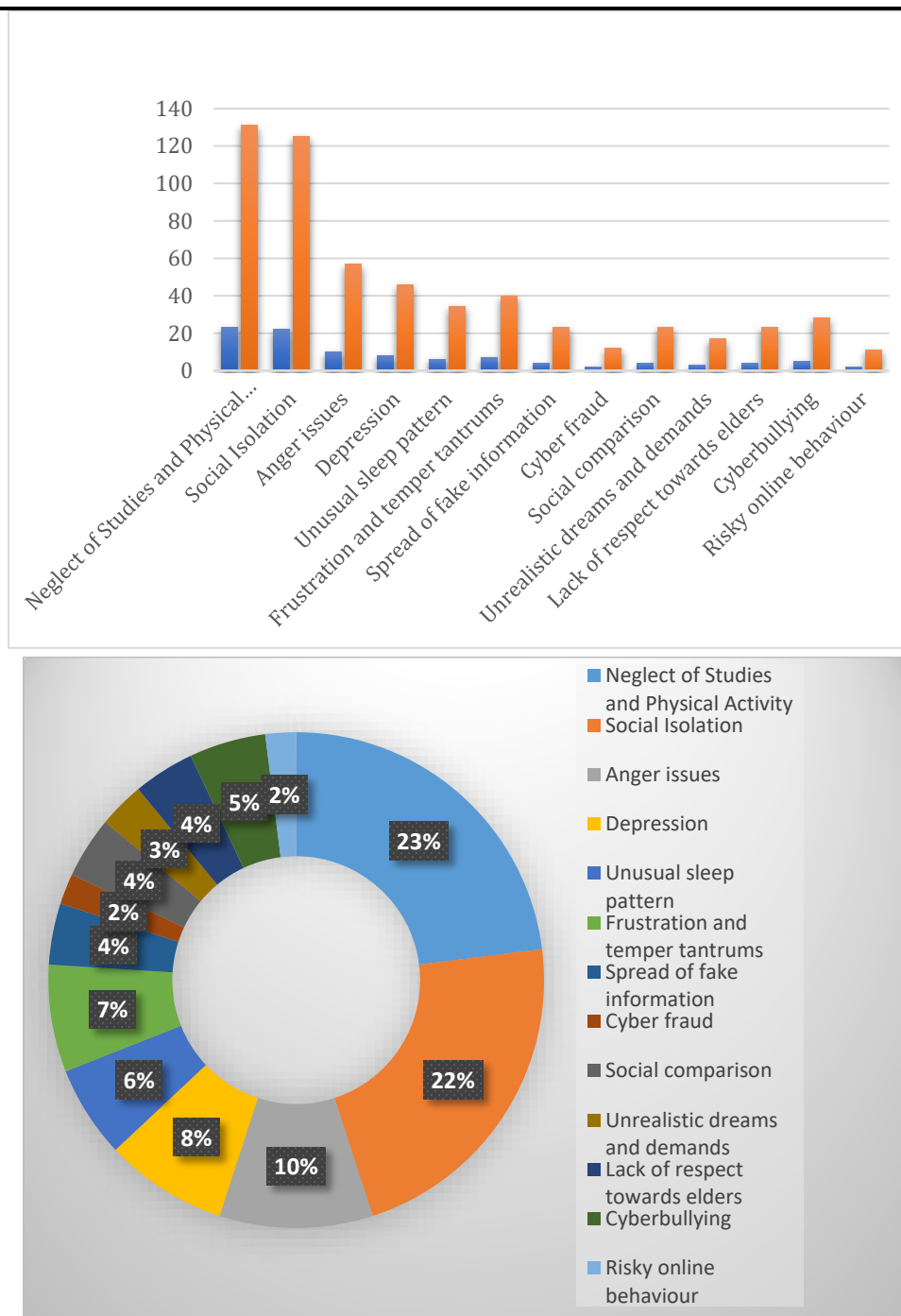
Children spend a significant amount of time online; occasionally, they follow their favourite users on social networking sites and stalk other users. A few of the types (5%) 28 claimed to spread abusive, sexist, and cynical remarks online. When utilizing social media, they speak indecently and use foul language. Sometimes they believe that mocking someone and using foul language is the hip way to get attention on social media. Children have said that they freely harass others online and use foul language, just like their well-known YouTubers. Some forms of cyberbullying are so addicting that they even expose other people's private and personal information online.

Risky online behaviour:

This study indicates that they are exposed to potentially harmful content on the internet, which has a greater impact on their behaviour. They talk about how hard it is for them to reject the surroundings and how enticing it is. They get fascinated when they make unknown, even unwanted, contact with others. Many of them are unaware of the possible risks associated with interacting with strangers. Some of them report (2%) 11 that the information is unsuitable, but they are unaware of the consequences of seeing it in that manner. Certain users have divulged their private details to their virtual pals.

Table:01 Showing total number of individuals with behaviour pattern % wise

S.no	THEMES	%	No of Individuals
1	Neglect of Studies and Physical Activity	23	131
2	Social Isolation	22	125
3	Anger issues	10	57
4	Depression	8	46
5	Unusual sleep pattern	6	34
6	Frustration and temper tantrums	7	40
7	Spread of fake information	4	23
8	Cyber fraud	2	12
9	Social comparison	4	23
10	Unrealistic dreams and demands	3	17
11	Lack of respect towards elders	4	23
13	Cyberbullying	5	28
14	Risky online behaviour	2	11
Total		100	570



8. CONCLUSION

The present-day speed of development in technology has wide ramifications in our lives. So is the case of our siblings who get affected directly and sometimes unknowingly. They are exposed to easy access to the internet as it opens a floodgate of information and entertainment. Secondly, the outbreak of the coronavirus forced all the educational institutions to shut down and hence, opened the use of mobile and other screens for the study that needed internet. The students were exposed to a new route to study where outdoor activities were curtailed. The overall situation generated a new behaviour formation.

Internet addiction among children in India is a growing concern that significantly impacts their behaviour. The literature review highlights the negative consequences of excessive internet use, including decreased academic performance, decreased physical activity, social isolation, and risky online behaviour. Children addicted to the internet

are more likely to spend excessive time online, neglecting their studies, physical activity, and other important aspects of life. This can lead to many negative outcomes, including decreased motivation for learning and decreased social skills.

To address the problem of internet addiction among children in India, it is important to raise awareness and educate them and their families about the dangers of excessive internet use. This could include providing information about the risks associated with excessive internet use and promoting healthy internet habits, such as setting limits on screen time and engaging in physical activities. Additionally, support by experts for children and their families should be provided to help them overcome internet addiction and its negative consequences. Internet addiction among children in India is a complex issue that requires a multi-faceted approach. By increasing awareness and education, and providing support for children and their families, we can help reduce the negative effects of internet addiction and promote healthy internet habits among children in India. It is difficult to portray any behaviour pattern as the outcome of internet addiction unless the life of an addict becomes unmanageable. If the addict regularly requires access to the internet for the satisfaction of his/her mood means a behavioural problem is developing or it has developed.

Griffiths (2009) argues about “the long-term damage to an adolescent’s mental health through playing online games” on the basis that any excessive activity can cause adverse situations in the life of a person. Favorably he advances that “If care is taken in the design, and if they are put into the right context, video (both online and offline) have the potential to be used as training aids in classrooms and therapeutic settings, and to provide skills in psychomotor coordination, and simulations of real-life events”. Despite having a supportive bent on online and offline games, Griffiths agrees that the internet may be a potentially addictive medium for those having a predisposition to it. Hence, adequate preventive efforts must be initiated to create a safe ring for those children who are exposed to addictive substances and behaviours in their puberty times.

9. LIMITATIONS

Since the interview sample was small and therefore unrepresentative of the target demographic, it is unclear to what degree this study may be generalized to this particular community. Given the problem's peripheral components, which serve as early warning signs of addiction, a bigger sample size is necessary. Even if the present study offers valuable insights for future investigations, it is crucial to incorporate cross-cultural situations in order to expand the scope and customize treatment strategies.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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