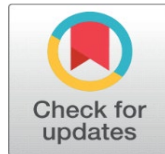
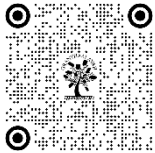


INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROBLEMATIC INTERNET USE AND MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES AMONG YOUTHS

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the relationship between problematic internet use and mental health outcomes among youth. Specifically, it aims to examine the levels of internet addiction and mental health among college students in the Kashmir valley, considering factors such as gender and domicile (rural/urban). The sample consists of 100 college students (50 males and 50 females, with equal representation from rural and urban areas) randomly selected from colleges in Srinagar. The Internet Addiction Scale by Kimberly Young is employed to assess internet addiction levels. The study hypothesizes significant differences in internet addiction and mental health based on gender and domicile, as well as a positive correlation between internet addiction and poor mental health outcomes among the youth population studied. The findings could provide valuable insights into the potential impact of problematic internet use on the mental well-being of young individuals, informing preventive measures and intervention strategies.

Keywords: Internet Addiction, Mental Health, Youth, Gender Differences, Rural-Urban Disparities

1. INTRODUCTION

The internet has become an integral part of modern life, with most people relying on it for various purposes, including communication, entertainment, education, and access to information. While the internet has undoubtedly brought numerous benefits, its excessive and uncontrolled use has raised concerns about its potential negative impacts, particularly on mental health. College students, who are often at a critical developmental stage and facing numerous academic and social pressures, are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of problematic internet use.

Problematic internet use, also known as internet addiction or compulsive internet use, refers to an excessive, uncontrolled, and potentially harmful pattern of internet use that can lead to negative consequences in various aspects of an individual's life. This behavior is characterized by a preoccupation with online activities, a loss of control over time spent online, and continued use despite negative consequences.

Several studies have explored the relationship between problematic internet use and mental health outcomes among college students, highlighting the potential risks and challenges associated with this issue. One of the primary concerns

is the impact of excessive internet use on psychological well-being, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, and low self-esteem.

Problematic internet use has been linked to an increased risk of developing depressive symptoms, as individuals may engage in excessive online activities as a means of coping with negative emotions or as a form of avoidance behavior. This behavior can lead to social isolation, neglect of important responsibilities, and a further exacerbation of negative mood states.

Additionally, research has suggested a potential connection between problematic internet use and anxiety disorders. The constant need to be online and the fear of missing out on online activities can contribute to heightened levels of anxiety and stress, particularly among young adults who heavily rely on social media and other online platforms for social connection and validation.

Beyond psychological distress, problematic internet use has also been associated with sleep disturbances, poor academic performance, and impaired interpersonal relationships. College students who struggle with excessive internet use may experience difficulties in managing their time effectively, prioritizing their academic responsibilities, and maintaining healthy social connections offline.

Furthermore, certain online activities, such as excessive gaming or exposure to inappropriate content, have been linked to negative mental health outcomes, including increased aggression, decreased empathy, and distorted body image perceptions.

It is crucial to recognize that the relationship between problematic internet use and mental health outcomes is complex and multifaceted. Various factors, including individual personality traits, coping strategies, social support systems, and environmental influences, can contribute to the development and maintenance of problematic internet use patterns.

Understanding the interplay between internet use, mental health, and well-being among college students is essential for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. By addressing this issue proactively, educational institutions, mental health professionals, and support services can work together to promote healthy internet use habits, foster resilience, and provide appropriate resources to support the overall well-being of college students.

2. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The issue of problematic internet use and its impact on mental health outcomes among college students is a significant concern in today's digital age. With the widespread adoption of the internet and digital technologies, students are spending an increasing amount of time online for various purposes, including academic work, social networking, entertainment, and information gathering.

Problematic internet use, characterized by excessive or compulsive internet use that interferes with daily activities and functioning, has been associated with a range of negative mental health outcomes. These outcomes may include depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, and decreased overall well-being. Several factors contribute to this relationship, such as the displacement of offline activities, the formation of unhealthy habits, and the potential for internet addiction. College students are particularly vulnerable to problematic internet use due to factors such as increased autonomy, academic demands, and the widespread use of digital technologies in educational settings. Additionally, the transition to college life can be a stressful period, and students may turn to the internet as a coping mechanism, leading to excessive or compulsive use.

Understanding the relationship between problematic internet use and mental health outcomes among college students is crucial for several reasons:

- **Mental health impacts:** Problematic internet use has the potential to exacerbate or contribute to the development of mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, and stress, which can further impair academic performance and overall well-being.

- Academic performance: Excessive internet use can lead to procrastination, decreased productivity, and poor time management, ultimately affecting academic achievement and success.
- Personal and social development: Problematic internet use may hinder the development of interpersonal skills, social relationships, and personal growth, which are essential components of the college experience.
- Intervention and prevention: Understanding this relationship can inform the development of effective interventions, support services, and prevention strategies to address problematic internet use and promote better mental health among college students.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives have been formulated for the present research proposal:

1. To find out the relationship between internet addiction and mental health among students.
2. To study the level of internet addiction among students with respect to gender.
3. To study the level of internet addiction among students with respect to domicile.
4. To study the level of mental health among students with respect to gender.
5. To study the level of mental health among students with respect to domicile.

4. HYPOTHESES

H₀₁ There is no significant correlation between internet addiction and mental health among students.

H₀₂ There is no significant difference in levels of internet addiction among students with respect to gender.

H₀₃ There is no significant difference in levels of internet addiction among students with respect to domicile.

H₀₄ There is no significant difference in levels of mental health among students with respect to gender.

H₀₅ There is no significant difference in levels of mental health among students with respect to domicile.

5. SAMPLE FOR THE STUDY

The sample for the present study was 100 college students (50 male & 50 female and 50 rural & 50 urban) college students of Kashmir valley (J&K). Further the sample is divisions of groups in terms of classes. The random sampling technique was used and the sample was collect in different colleges of Kashmir Valley. The investigator was collect the sample from Amar Singh College and S.P. College, Srinagar.

6. TOOLS USED DECEPTION OF THE TOOL

1. INTERNET ADDICTION SCALE

The internet addiction scale developed by Kimberly Young is one of the most utilized instruments for Internet addiction. Although many studies have documented psychometric properties of the addiction.

Table 1: Showing mean difference between male and female youth on their internet addiction

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value
Male	60	24.36	9.36	4.33*
Female	60	32.78	12.74	

**Significant at 0.05 level*

The above table indicates the mean difference between male and female drug addicted adolescents. The results indicate that there is a significant difference between male and female youth on the internet addiction. The t-value 4.33 which is significant at 0.05 level. The results indicate that female youth have high internet addiction as compared to male drug addicted adolescents.

Table 2: Showing the mean comparison of Male and female youth on emotional stability of mental health battery

Category	Mean	S.D	t-value	Level of significance
male adolescents	10.25	3.25	5.00	Significant at 0.01 level
female adolescents	8.35	2.12		

The perusal of above table shows the mean comparison of Male and female youth on emotional stability of mental health battery. The above table reveals that the mean score of Male adolescents is higher than the mean score of female adolescents and the difference is significant at 0.01 level. The male adolescents display better emotional stability as compared to Female adolescents.

Table 3: Showing the mean comparison of Male and female youth on over all adjustment of mental health battery

Category	Mean	S.D	t-value	Level of significance
male adolescents	36.25	3.25	7.36	Significant at .01 level
female adolescents	32.20	4.48		

A quick look on the above table reveals that there is a significant mean difference between two groups of students on overall adjustment of mental health battery. The mean score favours male adolescents which indicates that male adolescents showed better overall adjustment than the female adolescents.

Table 4: Showing the mean comparison of Male and female youth on autonomy of mental health battery

Category	Mean	S.D	t-value	Level of significance
male adolescents	13.28	2.40	6.42	Significant at .01 level
female adolescents	10.71	3.21		

The perusal of above table shows that the two groups of students viz. Male and female youth differ significantly on autonomy component of mental health battery and the difference is significant at 0.01 level. The result reveals that male adolescents are more autonomous and have better independence and self-determination in thinking than government students.

Table 5: Showing the mean comparison of Male and female youth on security-in security of mental health battery

Category	Mean	S.D	t-value	Level of significance
male adolescents	14.27	3.12	5.37	Significant at .01 level
female adolescents	12.28	2.12		

A quick look on the above table reveals that there is a significant mean difference between the two groups of students on security-insecurity component of mental health battery and difference was found to be significant at 0.01 level. The mean score favours male adolescents which indicates that male adolescents showed better sense of safety, confidence, freedom from fear than the female adolescents.

Table 6: Showing the mean comparison of Male and female youth on self-concept of mental health battery

Category	Mean	S.D	t-value	Level of significance
male adolescents	14.12	3.40	5.66	Significant at .01 level
female adolescents	13.10	2.58		

The perusal of above table shows the mean comparison of Male and female youth on self-concept dimension of mental health battery. As the mean score favours Male adolescents which indicates that male adolescents showed better attitude, knowledge of themselves and evaluation of their achievements than the female adolescents.

Table 7: Showing the mean comparison of Male and female youth on general intelligence of mental health battery.

Category	Mean	S.D	t-value	Level of significance
male adolescents	28.13	4.97	1.56	Significant at .01 level
female adolescents	27.10	4.36		

The perusal of above table reveals that there is no significant mean difference between Male and female students on general intelligence. The table indicates that both the groups displayed somewhat similar intelligence quotient.

Table 8: Showing the mean comparison of Male and female youth on overall dimensions of mental health battery

Category	Mean	S.D	t-value	Level of significance
male adolescents	59.72	5.12	5.67	Significant at 0.01 level
female adolescents	55.12	6.42		

The perusal of above table shows the mean difference of Male and female students on overall dimensions of mental health battery. The above table reveals that there is significant mean difference between Male and female students on overall dimension of mental health and the difference is significant at 0.01 level. As the mean score favours male adolescents which indicates that male adolescents displayed better mental health than female adolescents.

Table 9: Coefficient of Correlation between depression and internet addiction among drug addicted adolescents

	Mental Health	p
Internet addiction	.621*	.000

* $p < 0.01$ level of significance

The above table indicates the correlation between internet addiction among and mental health among drug addicted adolescents. The result of the table indicates that there is positive relationship between internet addiction and mental health. The p-value .621 which is significant and positive relationship between internet addiction and mental health among drug addicted adolescents.

7. CONCLUSION

There are significant differences between male and female drug-addicted adolescents in various aspects of mental health and internet addiction. Specifically, female youth have higher internet addiction compared to male drug-addicted adolescents. On the other hand, male adolescents displayed better emotional stability, overall adjustment, autonomy, security-insecurity, self-concept, and overall mental health than female adolescents. However, there was no significant difference in general intelligence between the two groups. Additionally, the study revealed a positive and significant relationship between internet addiction and mental health among drug-addicted adolescents.

8. SUGGESTION

- Since the study found that female youth experience higher levels of internet addiction compared to males, it is crucial to develop targeted interventions and awareness programs tailored to the unique needs and challenges faced by young females. These interventions should address the underlying factors contributing to problematic internet use among girls and provide them with coping mechanisms and support systems.
- Given the positive and significant relationship between internet addiction and poor mental health outcomes, it is recommended to integrate mental health support services within educational institutions and community centers. Counseling services, psychoeducational workshops, and access to mental health professionals can help address the mental health concerns arising from problematic internet use among youth.
- In addition to interventions, there is a need to promote digital literacy and responsible technology use among youth. Educational campaigns and workshops can be conducted to raise awareness about the risks associated with excessive internet use, the importance of self-regulation, and strategies for maintaining a healthy balance between online and offline activities.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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