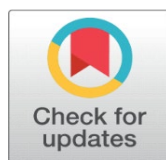


# IMPACT OF INTERNET ADDICTION ON A YOUNG ADOLESCENT BOY: AN INTERVENTIONAL CASE REPORT

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## ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the use of the internet and technology has become a boon. However, like a two-sided coin, it has both positive and negative impacts on our lives. As part of the positive changes in our lives, technology enables us to connect with people around the world and send messages to different parts of the country within a fraction of a second. However, excessive use of the internet can lead to addictive behavior like cyber bullying, online shopping, and taking away time from studies and other important activities such as physical activities. Therefore, in this case report, we aim to teach our client therapeutic techniques to promote the healthy use of the internet and prevent compulsive internet usage.

**Keywords:** Internet Addiction (IA), Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), Multicomponent Treatment, Psychosocial Stress, Parental Counseling

## 1. INTRODUCTION

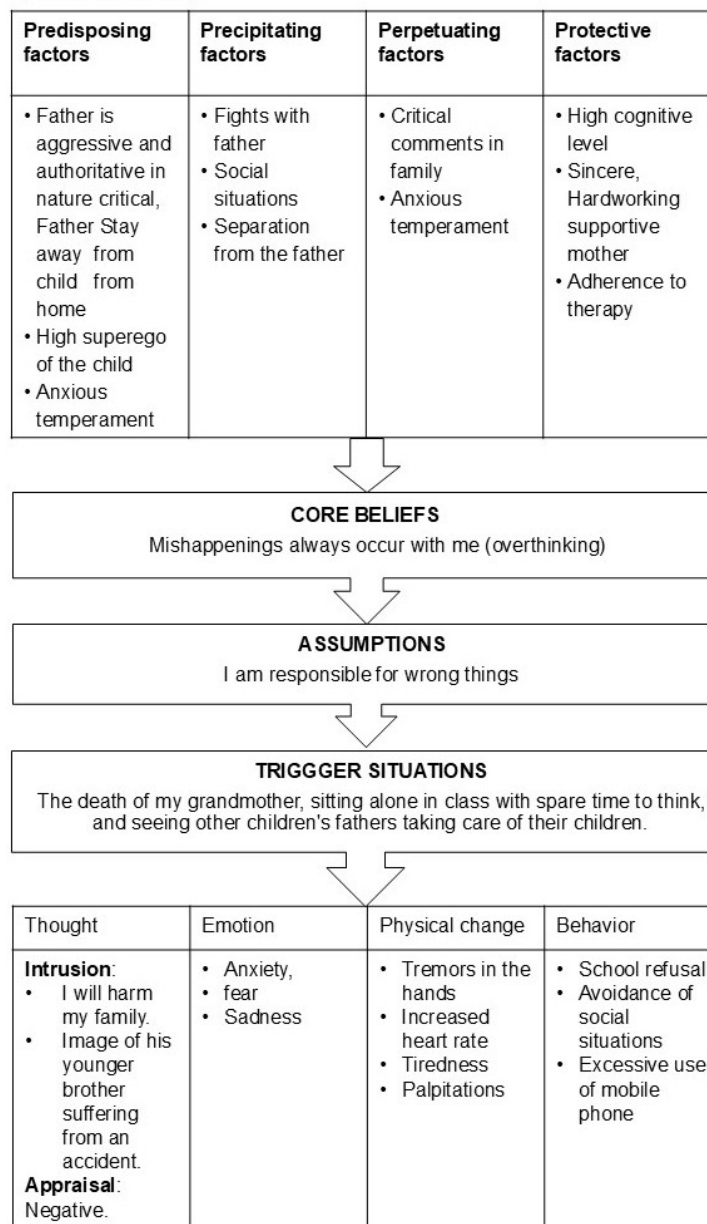
This extensive use of internet leads to the problem of Internet addiction especially among teenagers. Moreover, Internet addiction (IA) has become more widespread and is considered a social and public health-related problem. It is known that adolescents and young adults are at high risk and more vulnerable to IA. These groups, especially adolescents undergo a lot of emotional and social stress. Incomplete psychological maturity leads to a lack of behavioral control. These factors further drive them to engage in problematic behaviors such as IA.

In 2023, there were 5.3 billion users worldwide, which means that approximately two-thirds of the world's population was online. China led the way in terms of the number of online users, followed by India and the United States. By 2023, there will reportedly be 692 million internet users in India [1].

The World Health Organization, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), or the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) does not recognize excessive Internet use as a disorder. However, gaming disorder has been established and included in the ICD-11 [2]. There is a debate surrounding the diagnosis, including whether the disorder is a distinct clinical condition or a manifestation of underlying psychiatric disorders. Therefore, further research is still required in this field to establish new treatment guidelines to overcome IA.

This case report illustrates the use of a Multicomponent treatment/ Integrated Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) approach to treat Internet Addiction (IA) by addressing the condition's complex biological, psychological, and social factors, case formulation for the current case report based on the biopsychosocial model shown in figure 1 [3, 4]. The treatment combined various techniques, including cognitive restructuring, behavior modification, family therapy, and mindfulness to provide holistic, relapse prevention, individualized intervention [5]. By incorporating parental involvement, art therapy, and relaxation techniques, the approach aimed not only to reduce excessive internet use but also to improve the client's emotional regulation and coping skills [6]. This demonstrated the effectiveness of a tailored, multimodal treatment plan for managing IA and enhancing social interactions [7].

#### Case Formulation



**Figure 1:** CBT Case formulation module used in the case report, based on the biopsychosocial model by George Engel [10]

## 2. CASE REPORT

The case was about a 16-year-old male of middle socio-economic status from Varanasi (India) presenting to the OPD with a complaint of abuse towards his mother, feeling low, anger, school refusal, decreased appetite, and disturbed sleep. He was the only child of his conflicting parents. In 18 years of his parents' marriage, the initial years of his upbringing were good; hence, he had a good IQ. Everything was fine until his father became a severe alcoholic and started committing domestic violence at home. Earlier, it affected only his mother, but later on, he also became the victim of his father's anger and violence. Apart from the physical violence, he was also a victim of emotional abuse and often felt embarrassed for various reasons, such as his father not paying his school fees on time, which led to him being debarred from appearing in his final exams. This incident caused him to develop a fear of going to school; therefore, school refusal began. His decreasing marks in class reports showed the impact of all the chaotic activities he was facing. This leads him to physical and emotional disturbances and feeling low. Furthermore, he chose gadgets as his maladaptive coping mechanism to avoid these failures, embarrassments, and a destructive family environment. He got a laptop and started to play games on the internet. Moreover, the shocking part was his list of games, which was more than 50. To name a few, he had Valorant, Pub G, GTA Vice City, Free Fire, Gun Devil, Mortal Combat, etc. The nature of almost all the games was violent and highly competitive. In today's gaming world, the level of games has been highly upgraded. Nowadays, anyone can play online games and make friends virtually. This is a New Age Game Era that gives conflicting kids a window to explore more like-minded kids. Thus, it has become a new coping mechanism, and the kids were becoming pathological gamers.

### Impact of IA on this boy

- He became more isolated and introverted.
- He became easily irritated and frequently shouted at his parents.
- He developed increasing resentment towards his father and, later, towards his mother.
- He started skipping school regularly.
- He began exhibiting the same behaviors as his father, including physical and verbal abuse.
- He hesitated to interact with people in general.
- He preferred spending time alone in his room with his gadgets.
- He struggled to adapt to his environment and displayed inflexible behavior.

## 3. INTERVENTION: INTEGRATED CBT-IA FOR PATIENTS WITH IA

### 3.1. OBJECTIVE

The short-term objective of the intervention was to reduce symptoms of Internet Addiction (IA) and help the client regain control over their online behaviour. Whereas the long-term objectives focused on modifying dysfunctional beliefs related to intrusive thoughts about excessive mobile use, enabling the client to develop healthier perspectives on technology. Additionally, the intervention aimed to improve coping skills, equipping the client with effective strategies to manage stress and emotional distress without resorting to compulsive internet use. Lastly, the treatment sought to enhance daily functioning, including academic performance and overall well-being, to promote a balanced and productive lifestyle.

### 3.2. INTERVENTION

Our intervention strategy utilised an eclectic (multi-component) approach of integrated CBT-IA. Following are the various techniques utilised in combination to address Internet Addiction holistically.

- 1) Motivational Techniques - Identifying and recognizing the benefits and potential harms of Internet use [2].
- 2) Cognitive techniques - The intervention began with explaining the concept of Integrated CBT-IA and providing psychoeducation on Internet Addiction (IA) to help the client understand its impact. This included a detailed

discussion of the CBT-IA model along with the establishment of a therapeutic contract to ensure commitment to the treatment process. Additionally, individualized activity scheduling was implemented, incorporating distraction techniques to gradually reduce excessive internet use. A key component of the intervention was cognitive restructuring, which involved thought challenging, cognitive error correction, alternative thinking, and Socratic questioning to help the client develop healthier thought patterns and coping mechanisms [8]. In the behavioral techniques for children, an ABC (Activating event, Belief, and Consequence) table was used (shown in Table 1). The ABC model helps them identify their inaccurate beliefs. This lets you question their validity, which in turn improves their reactions [9].

- 3) Behavioural techniques -The intervention used behavior modification techniques to regulate internet use through structured routines and screen time limits. Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) and other relaxation methods were introduced to reduce stress, anxiety, and improve emotional regulation, fostering healthier coping strategies.

- 4) Apart from these art therapy and mindfulness are some other techniques that were employed.

Structure of sessions - A total of 12 sessions were conducted, with one session per week, each lasting one hour. Most of these sessions focused on the client, with some involving parental participation to ensure comprehensive support and engagement in the treatment process.

**Table 1:** An example of ABC table

Date___/___/___		Name of Person Observed: _____			
Observer: _____					
Behavior(s):_____					
Date	Time	Antecedent	Behavior	Consequence	Possible Function
19/02/15	3.30	He had seen his cousin sister making fun of him	He shouts at her	The mother shouts at the child	He avoids interacting with cousin

## 4. DISCUSSION

Excessive use of smartphones or the internet is a form of behavioural addiction that has developed worldwide. Nowadays, this problem is highly prevalent worldwide, although the American Psychiatric Association (APA) does not officially recognize the condition as a disorder [10].

Nonetheless, it is acknowledged as a behavioural addiction by many health or medical professionals and researchers worldwide. But still, it is positively and negatively impacting all the individuals in all the age groups globally. Therefore, its identification, assessment, and management are highly required or important for the healthy use of the internet, mobile, and other technologies. It is said that there is no need to quit or ban the internet, but we must teach people how to use it and avoid misusing it [5]. Therefore, professional guidelines of healthy use of the internet and its management should be developed by mental health and other related professionals. Professional treatment objectives should be to allow the use of the internet positively, not negatively, and compulsively. Therefore, psychological management of IA focuses on addressing the compulsive use of the internet. CBT has been found to be an evidence-based, effective treatment for IA in both young adults and adolescents [5]. In this case report, we have integrated various psychotherapeutic techniques with CBT to create a customized management plan that addresses all of the client's psychological issues based on the specific problems presented in the case.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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