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# Internet Addiction In Children And Its Effect On Mental Health

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## Abstract

Internet is used extensively across the globe since in the last decade. It is now in India the internet has moved into a new era called 5G4G. Children are the most at risk of problems with their internet usage due to their time spent on the internet. It could have adverse effects on their mental, physical and social wellbeing. Therefore, they are more susceptible to developing an addiction to the internet. This paper discusses about the internet addiction in children and its impact on mental health.

**Keywords** – Internet Addiction, Mental Health

## Introduction

We are currently living in an age of technological advancement. We can't even imagine our life today without computers, smartphones, and the internet helping us run these devices. But technology has its darker sides as well. Many parents express their concerns over their children's internet addiction.

Two things are the reasons behind the parents' concern; the first is the amount their kids spend on playing internet games, and the second is their reluctance to reduce the time. Children are spending too much time with electronic devices, affecting their social life. They don't want to eat, sleep, do homework, even don't want to engage in any outdoor activities.

Children also admit that they are addicted to internet games. Common Sense Media has conducted a study in 2016 where they surveyed children. The research outcome also reveals that children feel addicted to internet devices. Three-quarters of the participants accepted that they couldn't stop themselves from instant responding to social media posts, messages, and comments.

Spending too much time on the internet affects the mental health and psychological progress of children. This paper will discuss internet addiction in children and its impact on their mental health.

## What is addiction?

Addiction is a condition of the brain due to compulsive involvement with rewarding stimuli in spite of many adverse outcomes. Various intricate neurobiological and psychological matters are there that lead to addiction. People may be addicted to

smoking, drinking, consuming illegal drugs, and habits like using electronic devices, and many more. It is challenging to come out of addiction. Therefore, it should be checked before a practice turns into an addiction.

Addiction calls for problematic physical and natural involvement, which has made it challenging to treat. There have been many attempts to treat addiction entirely from a physical and fully environmental perspective that have failed. So, an extensive illustration of addiction should incorporate both biological and ecological perspectives. Griffiths' 'components model' explains addiction as the total of connected traits including mood, change, silence, tolerance, conflict, relapse, and withdrawal. These elements include both physical and environmental aspects of the nature of addiction. If all of these are present in anyone, then it will be considered an addiction.

### **Can the conception of internet addiction exist?**

The availability of personal computers within an affordable range and easy access to the internet and Wi-Fi make the internet famous. This accompanies a worry regarding its unnecessary and too much use. According to some research, excessive internet use can cause mental, social, educational, or professional issues.

In 1970, the first report regarding the unnecessary use of computers was reported, and by the 1980s, information was received regarding the addictive capacity of computer games. But till the 1990s, the expert didn't accept the internet as a medium that might grow addiction. According to Griffiths, excessive internet use can cause 'technological addiction' that could be either active or passive with lucrative and reinforcing characteristics.

Ivan Goldberg, a psychiatrist from New York, was the first to confirm the internet addiction. In 1995, Goldberg presented a list of symptoms for "Internet Addiction Disorder" according to him. Nevertheless, Ms. Kimberly Young searched thoroughly for these symptoms following a proper process. To establish her theory, she divided an individual as 'dependent' or 'non-dependent' on the internet. Kimberly's research has become the leader of the reference for future studies identifying the matter of internet addiction globally.

### **Criteria for identifying anyone having addiction:**

There are some criteria that Ms. Kimberly Young listed for diagnosing an individual as addicted to the internet. They are the following:

- An individual is always thinking about internet activities and planning for future use.
- When people are continuously increasing the time spent on the internet for satisfaction
- People tried but couldn't able to withdraw their growing internet usage
- Individuals suffering from mood swings, restlessness, depression, irritation, etc. when try to distance themselves from computers
- Individuals spend more time on the internet than expectation

Along with the points discussed above the minimum one of the following conditions must exist for a person to be called internet-addicted:

- People don't care about the loss of their close relations, jobs, education, or professional growth
- Individuals lie to their family members, doctors, or others to hide their excessive internet usage
- People use the internet as a medium to escape from their issues, anxieties, depression, etc.

If any one of the above-discussed conditions is detected, it will not be considered internet addiction. But when these behaviors start growing, the individuals can't control their lives, and the internet becomes an inseparable part of their lives. They don't bother about their relationship, professional growth, education, and family. Sometimes people use the internet as a medium for changing their mood. This is the indication that some issues are occurring. It is crucial to understand that it is not the amount of time an individual spends on the internet for detecting addiction but the internet's impact on their lives. In internet addiction, addicted people depend on it, want to be surrounded by it, to feel satisfied. They adopt unhealthy practices by leaving the healthy ones, choose temporary satisfaction instead of regular and intimate relationships.

Internet addiction grows similarly to alcohol or drug addictions. Sometimes people try but can't stop themselves from using the internet. They start losing self-control, which triggers their need to spend more and more time online and escape from failure. As a result, a sense of loss grabs them.

According to studies in America, one in eight individuals has internet addiction. The percentage is higher in other countries like China, Taiwan, and Korea. Thirty percent of the total population may suffer from issues in these countries due to excessive internet usage.

Sending sex images and messages through mobile phones and emails, which is also known as sexting, is the most prevalent internet addiction type. Sexual contents are primarily available on various sites, and people can access them easily. This has increased internet addiction to 60%. New issues like internet infidelity and online affairs have also been detected. As a result, it leads to separation and divorce. Last but not least, addiction to online games and role-playing are increasing internet addiction rapidly, particularly in China, Korea, and Taiwan (Jang KS et al.).

Gender impacts the applications type and reasons for growing internet addictions. Men like to dominate and search for sexual fantasies by using digital platforms. On the other hand, women search for real friends, romantic mates and like conversations where their looks will not be revealed. Men are prone to get addicted to online porn videos, games, and also gambling. But women become addicted to sex chats, social media, online shopping, etc.

According to the Indian national studies, more than 70% of internet addicts are also addicted to something else. The survey also stated that maximum internet addicts have psychological issues that force them to create a fantasy world to escape. In 75% of cases,

internet addicts suffer from relationship issues. For these individuals, the virtual world is the most reliable place.

Currently, the internet and smart devices are readily available. Smartphones, laptops, computers, and tabs are widely used in India. As a result, internet addiction is noticed among children and youths. This is a growing concern for parents globally. Let's discuss the tendency of internet addiction among school goers below.

### **Internet Addiction in Children and Youths:**

A recent study in Mumbai explored that among the 987 participants, 681 were boys, the percentage is 68.9%, 306 were girls, and the rate is 31.1%. The average age of the participants was 16.82. However, according to the survey average, 74.5% of the total participants were normal to medium internet users, and 0.7% fit in Young's addiction category and were detected as addicts. These addicts were sufferers of anxiety and depression.

Another research was conducted to find how much school-going children are addicted to the internet. Six hundred three students were offered the questionnaire, and forty-eight among them couldn't answer the questions and left the final term of the study. Total 555 questionnaires were considered for the final phase of the research. The researchers have seen that 202 students (36.3%) use the internet daily for three to five hours, where they mainly do social networking. A gender difference was spotted in internet usage. The boys use the internet primarily for social networking and playing games.

Interestingly, 43.3% of boys operate the internet in the evening, but girls (57.7%) primarily use the internet in the early morning. The maximum boys who participated in the survey had smartphones (44.5%), and some had personal laptops (30.9%). No participants visit the café to access the internet. Nevertheless, the research revealed that 43.7% of males and 30.4% of females use the internet daily for three to five hours. 84.3% of the participant students informed that they could avail the internet facility at home.

Another study was conducted to determine whether and how much internet addiction existed among board appeared learners and its impacts on their academic careers. Three hundred learners were randomly selected for the study, and Young's internet addiction theories were applied to test them. Ninety-four students (31.3%) couldn't answer all the questions correctly, scored only twenty marks, and were detected as the rare internet users. Ninety-six users are moderate users, which were 32% of all participants. They scored between twenty to forty-nine. Eighty participants scored between fifty to seventy-nine and were detected as the high users, and they were 10% of the participating students. Thirty students were found as excessive internet users, 10% of all, and were seen as addicts.

Some researchers arranged a cross-sectional survey in 2016 to trace internet addiction among college-goers and its connection with mental health in Nanded city. This research was conducted among Arts, Science, and Commerce students, and 265 students participated in the study. The research found 98 students as regular users, 90 were at high risk of developing addiction, and 99 were addicted.

In 2014, research was conducted to determine if students of professional courses were addicted to the internet. The participants were aged between fifteen to twenty-five. The researchers selected four hundred students who were using the internet minimum for six months. The students were offered questionnaires, and nine papers were rejected. Among 391 papers, 294 were detected as regular users, 137 had moderate addiction, and one was thoroughly addicted to the internet.

In 2016 a survey was organized to understand the internet addiction pattern among the school goers in North Indian city. It was a cross-sectional study, and three hundred students participated in it. Once again, the formula of Young was applied to test the internet addiction level. According to the survey outcomes, 61.34% of the participants began to access the internet after twelve years, and 38.66% of students started to access the internet before twelve. The research also revealed that 26.33% of learners regularly invest at least four hours on the internet. 28.66% of students said they often neglect their schoolwork and spend more time online.

In 2014 another research was arranged to find internet addiction among medical students and its pattern. Two hundred eleven medical students were included in the study from two different medical colleges, among which 57.2% were ladies, and 42.8% were gents. The study explored that 64.4% were medium internet users, 11.8% were nearly addicts, and 0.4% were totally addicted to the internet. Internet using patterns significantly varied as per gender. Students of this stream used the internet mainly for operating social networking sites. The percentage was 59.7%, while 18.9% stayed online to download media files, and 12.3% of medical students used the internet to play online games. Though very disheartening, only 0.1% use the internet for their education. Nearly 63% of students access the internet through their smartphones.

A survey was also arranged to find out internet addiction among children and youths in China. Two thousand six hundred twenty youths with an average age of 15.19 years were there till the completion of the study. 2315 said that they didn't use the internet, and 64 adolescents (2.4%) fulfilled all the criteria of Young and were detected as addicted. Among the 64 students, 53 were boys, and 11 were girls, and the amount of internet usage varied and ranged between 3.1 hours to 11.1 hour.

### **Impact of internet addiction on the mental health of the children:**

The excessive use of the internet harms children's mental health and cognitive skills. It may cause the following issues:

- **A lower span of attention:** Excessive internet use can lead to concentration and attention-related complications for the children.
- **Increase aggression:** Children are susceptible, and due to internet use, they come across many things that are not meant for them, making them aggressive.
- **Health issues:** Excessive internet use can cause complications related to eyes, neck, body structure, overstrain, arm, finger, and hand
- **Declined quality of sleep:** Children addicted to the internet tend to suffer from sleep disorders.

- **Chances of depression:** Children who use the internet for more than expected hours can suffer from depression
- **Obesity:** Overuse of the internet results in less activity, which leads to obesity.
- **Emotional issues:** Internet addiction often causes attitude and emotional issues.

### **Treatments for internet addiction:**

Treatments are available for internet addiction, including inpatient, outpatient facility, aftercare help, and volunteer groups. Family counseling, support teams, and workshops are also part of care. Counseling is a highly essential measure for treating internet addiction as it helps the victim to realize the value of family and other relations.

### **Conclusion:**

With the rise of social networking sites, children and youths are spending lots of time on social media and growing the tendency of addiction to the internet. The last era observed the extensive growth of social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram, which attracted many people to it irrespective of age. As a result, communications increased between people through these sites. These sites indeed increased connection between people, but these sites are held responsible for growing internet addiction.

Children and youths are addicted to online games and social networks without knowing their side effects. According to reports, social-network users invest nearly 5.5 hours every month, three times more than time spent on other sites.

These research outcomes demand more research on technological dependency. But the research results indicate that school-going children are tended to internet addiction, and COVID-19 has triggered this tendency. So, parents should not allow their kids to spend too much time on the net, and the use of mobile phones should also be restricted for kids. These are the only ways to keep children away from the internet and prevent internet addiction.

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