



Original Article:

Reconnoitering the Influence of Socio-demographic Factors on Internet Addiction

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Abstract: Internet addiction (IA) has gradually emerged as a detrimental mental health problem, especially amongst youngsters. The current study endeavoured to ascertain the determinants of IA amidst this at-risk population, by conducting an exploratory cross-sectional study among 307 undergraduate students of a public university. Information about sociodemographic characteristics, Internet usage patterns, and responses to Internet Addiction Test (IAT) were gathered through self-report questionnaires. Findings indicated no significant gender difference in the IA scores. Time spent online and academic achievements were found to be significantly associated with IA, across gender. Regression analysis indicated that only race/ ethnicity profile (for male students), time spent online (for female students) and monetary expenditure on internet usage (across gender) were independent predictors of IA. Considering that gender differences in IA were not highlighted by the present study, further studies are recommended so as to have a thorough understanding of IA amongst the susceptible younger demographic.

Key Words: Internet addiction, University students, Gender, Sociodemographic determinants

Introduction:

Internet has become an inexorable part of our daily lives. Besides providing astounding accessibility to information, Internet-mediated communication has also turned out to be an avenue for a plethora of online activities. Given the user-friendliness and accessibility of Internet, anytime or anywhere, it may come as no surprise that an alarming number of people, display ostensible signs of addiction to the digital world. Internet Addiction (IA), otherwise called pathological or problematic Internet use is a recent and increasingly recognized disorder (1, 2) which has received growing attention worldwide over the past two decades.(3) First

introduced by Goldberg (1995) (4) and made popular in Young's (1996) (5) seminal study, the term Internet Addiction has been defined by Shapira et al., (2003) (6) as an individual's inability to control Internet use, which in turn leads to feelings of distress and functional impairment of daily activities. Despite being the subject of numerous debates, particularly concerning its terminology, definition and theoretical basis, (7-10) IA has gradually appeared as a new mental health concern. (11)

The consequences of IA are insidious, becoming apparent, only after months of problematic Internet use and eventually engulfing all aspects of the individual's life. (12) Negative effects of over-engagement with the Internet are multiple, and include developing problems in any of the five areas: scholastic, occupational, interpersonal, financial, or physical. (13) University students are a group that may be particularly vulnerable to IA. Burgeoning literature indicates that many university students suffer from a variety of health and psychosocial problems due to IA.(14) The accessibility of the Internet on university campuses, the personal freedom and a significant amount of unstructured time, and the academic/social challenges many students experience as they leave home for the first time, all contribute to increased rates of IA. (15, 16)

Over the years, there has been growing concerns about IA and its detrimental consequences, especially among the younger population. Hence, the main objective of the current study was to examine and identify the sociodemographic characteristics, gender differences and determinants of Internet addiction among university students. It is anticipated that findings from this study would facilitate in developing effective intervention strategies, so as to reduce the negative ramifications of IA.