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Problematic Internet Use and Its Major Correlates

Vindhya Rathore & Megha Arya

Abstract

Internet Addiction (I.A.) has been the centre of research since a decade. With the pandemic, cases are also on the rise. The term has also been addressed with various synonyms such as Problematic Internet Use (P.I.U.), Compulsive Internet Use (C.I.U), I-disorder, Pathological Internet Use (P.I.U.) and Internet Addiction Syndrome. The prime target for this problem is adolescents as they are curious to explore the wider virtual world. This happens in the form of social media, gaming, shopping and sometimes gambling. With various physical and behavioural changes in the form of transformation of body and appearance, issues of aggression and irritability are also prevalent in this age group. To top it all, the pandemic has only worsened the situation by giving them a prolonged exposure to internet and lack of physical proximity with peers and family. Besides this, the presence of depressive symptoms is also seen.

The current research aims to study the relation of P.I.U with depression and aggression. For the same, 400 adolescents of co-educational schools between 10-12 years were considered. Internet Addiction Test (I.A.T.) by Young (1995), Depression self-rating scale for children by Birlson (1978) and Aggression Scale- Orpinas and Frankowski (2001) were used for administration. Findings indicated that both depression and aggression shared a significant positive association with P.I.U ($p < 0.01$). This is strongly indicative of the fact that depression and aggression are highly prevalent in this age group and are also strong contributors towards P.I.U. Adolescents who are more aggressive, may engage in bullying in the virtual world which they may not do otherwise in the real world. Also, those who are lonely and/or show depressive tendency, may find this route as an only alleviating medium.

Keywords: Problematic Internet use, Addiction, Compulsive internet use, Pathological internet use, aggression, depression.

Introduction

Internet Addiction

Coined by Goldberg in 1995 and Young's (1998) contribution led to the further development of the concept and of the internet addiction test. It has also been addressed alternatively as Problematic Internet Use (P.I.U), I-disorder, Compulsive Internet Use, Pathological Internet Use (P.I.U) and Internet Addiction Syndrome.

Excessive usage of the internet can lead an individual to being an addict, where daily, social and occupational functioning is severely jeopardized. The person may try to withdraw use which only results in failed attempts.

The following table describes the type of I.A as highlighted by Young along with its describing features:

TYPE	FEATURE
Cyber sexual addiction	compulsive use of adult websites for cybersex and cyberporn
Cyber-relationship addiction	over-involvement in online relationships
Net compulsions	obsessive online gambling, shopping or day-trading
Information overload	compulsive web surfing or database searches
Computer addiction	obsessive computer game playing

While each of these types holds relevance and contribution in the formation of I.A., it is cyber relational addiction that deserves due attention. As the name suggests, people in this type of addiction seek to engage themselves in virtual relations through the online platform, mainly through the access of social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Dr. Parikh has mentioned that due to excessive usage of social media, there are times when an individual is unable to distinguish between right and wrong (Noori, 2019).

Adolescents are comparatively prone to this category as they feel that the information provided on social media and relations formed are strong

and authentic. They rely much on this platform that they tend to forget the real world. He also emphasizes on the concept of 'Facebook depression' that describes the usage of social media by an adolescent to the extent that s/he feels inferior by the mere influence of other adolescents on the platform. With a high need of approval and acceptance from their peers, they engage in various ways to get the same by posting pictures that reflect the same. Also, feelings of inferiority may arise when, at times, they perceive that they are not receiving enough attention and importance in the form of likes and posting positive comments. This may create a sense of insecurity and instils a fear of missing out (FOMO) in them (Noori, 2019). It is stated that children in the age of 12 years are suffering from this phenomenon on a severe level as around 28 million users are school going children and 3 million mobile users are below the age of 18 years. It impacts them on all aspects, be it in academic or curricular spheres, in terms of their interpersonal relations. It is perceived as a slow poison in their lives.

Depression

Depression can be defined as a 'low, sad state marked by significant levels of sadness, lack of energy, low self-worth, guilt, or related symptoms.' (Comer, 2015)

Depression seems complicated, difficult to understand and comprehend, not just for the patient but for family and significant others as well. This is due to the words which are used frequently to describe it such as sadness, melancholy, despair, guilt, and pessimism to name a few. These words are used to describe negative mood states, which are temporary and situation specific. An individual experiences these when the situation is perceived as negative. Eventually over the course of time and situation, the individual decides to take an appropriate course of action to wane these away, usually by having a strategic approach. Thus, they generally do not cause significant impairment in daily and occupational functioning. As the situation normalizes, they tend to weaken and ultimately disappear.

To highlight the features which makes depression different from a negative mood state, the DMS-V criteria are considered in the case of diagnosis (American Psychiatric Association, 2013):

- A depressed mood during most of the day, particularly in the morning.
- Fatigue or loss of energy almost every day.

- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt almost every day.
- Impaired concentration, indecisiveness.
- Insomnia (an inability to sleep) or hypersomnia (excessive sleeping) almost every day.
- Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in almost all activities nearly every day.
- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide (not just fearing death).
- A sense of restlessness or being slowed down.
- Significant weight loss or weight gain.

Aggression

As per Anderson and Bushman (2002), human aggression is “any behavior directed toward another individual that is carried out with the proximate (immediate) intent to cause harm. In addition, the perpetrator must believe that the behavior will harm the target, and that the target is motivated to avoid the behavior”.

- Over in nature- Vented out generally in face of overt actions; it is often preceded by negative thoughts and mood. These negative thoughts are in the form of hostile thoughts regarding the other person. Similarly negative moods include vengeance and negativity towards others in general. However, only overt actions are considered as aggression. Negative mood and cognitions are excluded even though they might be determiners and antecedents towards this thought.
- Intentional act- For a behaviour to be classified as aggressive, it must be intentional, with the motive of causing harm to another person. Any act that is accidental or done with an aim to benefit from another person is not classified in the aggressive category. However, an intentional act to harm another person that goes in vain also comes in the category of aggression.

Review of Literature

Following is recent research that shows the evident relation between P.I.U

and depression:

P.I.U. and Depression

- Erceg, Flander and Brezinščak (2018) conducted a study on “The relationship between compulsive internet use and symptoms of depression and anxiety in adolescence”. The study concluded with the finding that adolescents with higher Compulsive Internet Usage displayed higher levels of symptoms related to depression and anxiety.
- Odaci and Cikricki (2017) conducted a study on “An exploration of the associations among internet use, depression, anxiety and stress among youths”. Results revealed a significant positive correlation between all variables. Regression analysis shows that problematic internet use negatively predicts depression.
- Subhashini and Praveen (2018) conducted a study on “An era of digital slavery: a study on internet addiction among professional college students of Hassan, Karnataka”. I.A. and depression shared significant association.

P.I.U and Aggression

The following studies show recent literature on the relationship between P.I.U and aggression

- Ravindran, Maveer and Balakrishnan (2015) conducted a study titled “Psychological Attributes of Problematic Internet Use among Students of Selected Engineering Colleges in Chennai”. Problematic internet users who have obtained high scores on hostility and found to be more hostile than the average users.
- Teng and Liu (2014) carried out a study on “Online gaming, internet addiction, and aggression in Chinese male students: the mediating role of low self-control”. A positive correlation was evident between variables. Violent online game exposure predicted aggressive acts and I.A.
- Ko, Yen, Liu, Huang and Yeng (2009) conducted a study on “The associations between aggressive behaviors and internet addiction and online activities in adolescents”. The purpose of the study was two-fold: Firstly, analyzing the association between the two

variables and secondly, understanding the way gender, school and depression moderate this association.

Methods

IV. Objectives:

- To study the relationship between depression and P.I.U.
- To evaluate the relation between aggression and P.I.U.

V. HYPOTHESIS:

- H1: There will be a significant positive correlation between depression and P.I.U.
- H2: There will be a significant positive correlation between aggression and P.I.U.

VI. Sample:

The sample for the current study would be adolescents aged between 10 years - 13 years from private schools of Jaipur city. The sample would further comprise of 200 girls and 200 boys. (N=400).

Inclusion Criteria:

- Students in the age range of 10-13 years.
- Students belonging to urban area from Jaipur.
- Students studying in co-educational schools in Jaipur city having well established computer labs.
- Students with internet access.

Exclusion Criteria:

Students not meeting inclusion criteria.

VII. Measures:

- Internet Addiction Test – Young (1995).

- Depression self-rating scale for children- Birlson (1978).
- Aggression Scale- Orpinas and Frankowski (2001)

VIII. Design Of The Study:

Correlation design would be used for the study.



RESULTS:

Mean and S.D of Internet Addiction (I.A), Depression (D), Aggression (A)

TABLE I

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
I.A	46.67	15.704
DEPRESSION	9.90	4.149
AGGRESSION	18.71	15.273

Table I shows the descriptive statistics which includes mean and standard deviation with respect to each variable of the study. The sample of the study comprised 400 adolescents. The mean value of dependent variable, which is I.A is 46.67 and standard deviation is 15.704. The mean value of independent variables of the study i.e., depression, aggression is 9.90, 18.71 and standard deviation are 4.149, 15.273.

TABLE II

Correlation analysis between Internet Addiction (I.A), Depression (D), Aggression (A)

VARIABLES	I.A
Depression	.396**

Aggression	.546**
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**Correlation is significant at 0.01 level.

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 level.

The above table shows correlation among the variables of the study. From the table it is evident that depression ($r = .396, p < .01$) and aggression ($r = .546, p < .01$) show a highly significant and positive correlation with I.A.

Conclusion

Our current study has focused on aggression and depression and their relationship with P.I.U. As evident from the above result tables, our hypotheses have been proved significantly. Aggression as a psychosocial variable has exerted a significant impact on P.I.U. Thus, this variable acts as an addition to the existing common ones such as personality, academic achievement, and anxiety. It also indicates that young adolescents have a high susceptibility to develop P.I.U.

There is also a mark of concern as now the reach of the internet is slowly reaching rural areas with the closure of schools due to pandemic. With many children getting an exposure to the internet, the menace is not too far. Thus, this population can also be the next target towards inclusion. A comparative study can also be proposed between the two age groups- one comprising young adolescents and the other late adolescents.

The cases of P.I.U will only rise with years to come. With various additional variables being added to a more or lesser degree, it is necessary to also find necessary interventions in the form of support groups, therapy, and counselling for severe cases. Parents, teachers are the prime stakeholders for the same. They can highlight this disadvantage from time to time. Also, the selection of a good peer group is also important since they are the agents of socialization at that point and can provide the correct direction of technology utilization.

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