

Communication

Is there an internet addiction escalating in COVID-19?

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Abstract: In the midst of the coronavirus outbreak, many countries around the globe initiated lockdown protocols and social distancing procedures for public safety that shifted daily routines to online activities through the internet. Such technology-led new normal life might augment internet addiction. For a better tomorrow, we must act now.

Keywords: Internet addiction; COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is an extraordinary challenge for the global community including the adolescents [1,2]. Countrywide lockdowns have become crucial to control the pandemic due to comprehensive spread of COVID-19. However, social distancing or self-isolation may also lead to increases loneliness and stress which can alter the consumption of internet habits. Evidence suggests that when people have negative feeling like anxiety and worry, using internets, video gaming or social media engagement could offer temporary relief from those undesirable distresses [3].

There is still lack of evidence about the effect of prolonged and repeated pandemic lockdowns on young people and how they are becoming increasingly hooked on the dopamine hit they get from screen time. More and more parents are worried about this. They fear that their children spending hours on computers and phones, gaming and studying, might turn into an Internet addiction. Many studies revealed the negative impact of Internet addiction such as school burnout, increased risk-taking attitude, increased depressive disorder, symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and feelings of loss of control, anger, social withdrawal, and familial conflicts leading to mental health problems [4,5].

Internet addiction is a broad term that covers a range of behaviors, such as (1) Cybersex addiction is one of the more self-explanatory internet addictions which can be harmful to one's ability to form real-world sexual, romantic, or intimate relationships; (2) Interactive activities such as online gambling, trading stocks, online auctions, and compulsive online shopping which can have a detrimental impact on one's financial stability and disrupt job-related duties; (3) Online social life, a person may be left with limited social skills and unrealistic expectations concerning in-person interactions; (4) Computer gaming addiction is the oldest type of internet addiction, and it is still prevalent and harmful today.

Dr. Kimberly Young [6] defined Internet Addiction describing that anyone possessing five or more of a set of eight symptoms suffers with the symptoms including

1. Preoccupation with thinking about the internet and anticipating the next session.
2. Increasing amount of time needed to gain same level of satisfaction.
3. Unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back or stop;
4. Restless, irritable, and depressed mood when attempting to cut down or stop;

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5. Staying on longer than intended;
6. Jeopardizing the loss of significant relationship, job, school, or career scopes;
7. Lying to family members and others to conceal involvement; and
8. Using the internet to escape from problems or relieve anxiety, and depression.

Recent reports indicated that some internet users were being addicted to the internet in much the same way those others become addicted to drugs, alcohol, or gambling,[7] which results in academic failure, reduced work performance and even marital discord and separation. This is because under brain scans, both internet addiction disorder and substance abuse addiction share a similar neurological footprint. While substances create addiction by ingesting chemicals that release powerful neurochemicals, process addictions (such as video games, gambling, or the internet) are the result of behaviors that engage these same neurochemicals' release. So, whether this comes from engaging in certain behaviors or taking certain chemicals, the results are often very similar [8].

The bottom line is that internet addiction is a complex phenomenon which impacts a growing pool of adolescents who are nation's future generation. For better tomorrow we must act now. Use of the internet is legitimate in current online school, business, and home practice such as in electronic correspondence to vendors, distance learning or electronic banking. Therefore, traditional abstinence models are not practical interventions when they prescribe banned internet use, several techniques to treat Internet addiction are:

- (1) seeking therapy which can be asked to a reliable friend or professional therapy;
- (2) following a routine is the key to resolve internet addiction issues and can select a time for internet usage as a part of the routine;
- (3) prioritize the needs for meetings, homework like task first and then everything including the internet usage later;
- (4) find the cause of possible reasons of using internet too much to sort out a way to resolve the unnecessary use of the internet.

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