

Internet Addiction – Pathological Use of the Internet

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Abstract

The excessive and uncontrolled use of the Internet is an emerging pathological behavior that affects both students and adults. This article examines the phenomenon of Internet addiction, its psychological and social dimensions, and the contributing factors that foster dependence on digital environments. Special emphasis is placed on the developmental vulnerabilities of children and adolescents, the role of the family and school, and the preventive strategies that educational institutions can implement. The aim is to inform educators and parents about the dangers of pathological Internet use and to propose practical interventions that promote balanced digital literacy.

Keywords: Internet Addiction; Digital Behavior; Students; Educational Prevention; Pathological Use; Online Dependency

1. Introduction

The Internet has revolutionized communication, learning, entertainment, and access to information. While it offers numerous benefits, the line between functional and pathological use is often blurred, particularly among children and adolescents who lack the maturity to set boundaries. Internet addiction is increasingly recognized as a behavioral disorder with significant implications for mental health, academic performance, and social functioning.

2. Defining Internet Addiction

Internet addiction, or problematic Internet use (PIU), refers to excessive engagement with online activities to the extent that it disrupts daily life, interpersonal relationships, and responsibilities. Although not yet officially recognized as a clinical disorder in the DSM-5, many researchers and clinicians consider it a serious psychological condition. It shares characteristics with other behavioral addictions, such as compulsive gaming, gambling, or smartphone overuse.

3. Risk Factors and Causes

Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to Internet addiction due to developmental factors such as identity exploration, emotional instability, and a heightened need for social connection. Other contributing factors include:

- Lack of parental supervision and digital literacy
- Emotional neglect or loneliness
- Low self-esteem and social anxiety
- Escapism from school stress or family problems
- Technological features such as instant gratification, algorithmic personalization, and endless scrolling contribute to addictive patterns of use.

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4. Psychological and Social Consequences

Internet addiction can lead to a range of adverse outcomes:

- Sleep disturbances and irregular eating habits
- Decline in academic performance
- Withdrawal from social and family life
- Increased levels of depression and anxiety
- Impaired concentration and decision-making

In extreme cases, pathological use may co-occur with other mental health disorders or even lead to internet-related aggression.

5. The Role of Family and School

Parents and educators play a critical role in identifying early signs of problematic use and setting healthy digital boundaries. Open communication, emotional support, and the promotion of offline activities are essential protective factors. Schools must incorporate digital education into their curriculum, helping students develop media literacy, critical thinking, and responsible online behavior.

6. Prevention and Educational Interventions

Educational prevention is a key pillar in combating Internet addiction. Effective strategies include:

- Awareness campaigns targeting students and parents
 - Training programs for teachers on digital risks
 - Development of school policies on screen time and device use
 - Integration of social-emotional learning to enhance self-regulation
 - Collaboration between schools, mental health professionals, and local communities can foster a holistic approach to prevention.
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7. Conclusion

Internet addiction is a complex and evolving phenomenon that calls for vigilance, education, and coordinated intervention. By empowering students with digital literacy and supporting families through guidance and awareness, schools can significantly reduce the risks of pathological Internet use and promote a healthy relationship with technology.

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