



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



COVID 19, problematic internet use and psychological wellbeing among students

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Abstract

This research aimed at exploring the multifaceted impact of excessive internet use on psychological wellbeing during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The study identified and analyzed the ways in which long-term internet exposure, a necessity during lockdown periods, has contributed to various challenges such as an increased anxiety, depression level, rise in negative emotions, difficulties in coping up with stress, interpersonal and behavioral issues. The shift to a technology-centric lifestyle, with limited opportunities for in-person interaction, has led to an increased dependency on digital devices. Such reliance has implications for students' mental health.

Keywords: Internet use; Problematic Internet Use; Psychological wellbeing; Student; COVID 19

1. Introduction

Novel coronavirus, 2019 (Covid 19) being the biggest global pandemic, the world has ever witnessed in the recent past. The pandemic and its precautionary lockdown not only gave the world a new picture about its seriousness but it also demonstrated significant changes in individual's life both in professional and personal areas.

Human beings are distinguished by their social skills which include effective use of language and emotions in communication and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships. These capabilities have always set humans apart in the natural world and are crucial for adapting to an increasingly technology-driven society. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic marked an unprecedented shift in how people interacted, leading to severe disruptions in education and daily routines. With lockdowns imposed globally, students experienced reduced exposure to physical social interactions and a sudden surge in digital and online activities.

With the spread of the COVID 19 pandemic, lockdowns had implemented by restricting human gathering and direct interactions. This umbrella of restrictions included educational institutions too. The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically transformed daily life, particularly lives of students. Students were very much affected because of pandemic, as this lockdown completely squeezed their outside exposure and shifted teaching-learning process solely to virtual mode.

1.1. Problematic Internet use

Problematic Internet use commonly termed as internet addiction can be described as excessive engagement with the internet, unsatisfied urge and fantasy regarding internet use, failed efforts of self-control in internet use, reduced social life, more actual time than planned time virtually, discomfort and unpleasantness when not virtually active (Young, 2004).

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During COVID, youth particularly adolescents found with multipurpose internet use which included activities like social, educational, informational, and recreational (Dong, Yang, Lu, & Hao, 2020).

Multifaceted effects of acute internet exposure on mental health and wellbeing among students during and post covid period. Lockdowns and isolations were distressful and psychologically unpleasant for everybody especially students who were supposed to explore more.

The restrictions to limit movements, quarantines and physical distance practices made students to focus more on virtual mode through gadgets lead dormant life style patterns.

Mandatory online classes without direct physical interactions manifested in certain psychological discord. Keeping the above in mind the current study reviewed the factors and effects of student's internet exposure during covid and post covid period

Objectives

To assess the role of problematic internet use on psychological wellbeing among students during and post COVID19 pandemic.

2. Method of study

The present study used Narrative review method to address the objectives. The process involved selectively analyzing and summarizing previous studies in a given area.

2.1. Key findings

Problematic internet use affects mental health and wellbeing among students during and post covid period. Lockdowns and isolations were distressful and psychologically unpleasant for everybody especially students who were supposed to explore more. The restrictions to limit movements, quarantines and physical distance practices made students to focus more on virtual mode through gadgets lead dormant life style patterns. Mandatory online classes without direct physical interactions manifested in certain psychological discord. Certain studies have found the widespread effects of problematic internet use during and post covid period

This Pandemic witnessed various behavioral and affective manifestations including sleep disturbances (Siddique et al., 2021; Conversano, 2021; González-Sanguino et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2020; Marazziti et al., 2020; Orrù et al., 2021a; Şimşir et al., 2022). Further these issues combined with a rise in aggression and abuse (Boxall et al., 2020).

COVID-19 followed by lockdowns helped internet-based addictions to reach its peak, as study highlighted rise of more than 52% of internet use (Jokic-Begic et al., 2020; Khubchandani et al., 2021; Siste et al., 2020).

Further, a study reported adolescents strive for social connection could contribute their internet use and increased Covid anxiety (Magson et al., 2021).

Gjoneska et al. (2022) in their review summed increase in PUI during the COVID-19 epidemic, that is especially in online gaming, gambling, and pornography use, and its connection to heightened mental health issues. Kamaşak et al. (2022) analyzed the impact of COVID-19 on internet use in children (8-17 years old), and found an increase in problematic internet use (17.1%) with behavioral manifestations.

Problematic internet use negatively affects the biopsychosocial and cognitive development of adolescents (Chung, Sum, & Chan, 2019; Lo, Lai, Ng, & Wang, 2020). Kumar Ranjan et al. (2021) found out a positive link between internet addiction and anxiety symptoms. A probable reciprocal association between anxiety and online addiction was also shown by their study's finding that anxiety predicted internet addiction. Because PIU can be used to both exacerbate and control anxiety, this underscores the complex relationship between PIU and students' well-being.

Tomczyk et al. (2020) study on PIU in Polish adolescents (n=3569, median age 16) identified concerning rates of PIU, with 40% exhibiting symptoms and 5% experiencing severe PIU.

Sanchez-Fernandez et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review on PIU in university students. Prevalence ranged widely (4%-51%). Ten factors predicted PIU, categorized into use patterns (time online, gaming), psychological aspects

(depression, negative affect, impulsivity), lifestyle factors (stress, sleep quality, substance use), and one protective factor (conscientiousness).

Qeadan et al. (2022) explored the link between problematic internet use (PIU) and substance misuse in 417,780 US college students. Their findings reveal a significant association, with PIU increasing the likelihood of substance misuse behaviors and diagnoses, as 123,330 (29.52%) reported PIU.

A study by Romero-Rodríguez et al. (2022) focussed on problematic internet use (PIU) among 1013 Spanish students revealed high prevalence (12.5%) and a complex interplay of factors influencing risk.

Ko'zybska et al. (2023) on their study suggested males, science students, and those using computers more frequently are at higher risk. Interestingly, PIU severity correlated with the importance students gave internet as entertainment.

2.2. In Indian context

Fernandes et al. (2020) found demonstrate a correlation between problematic internet use (including gaming addiction and compulsive use) and negative outcomes like depression, loneliness, and anxiety among adolescents.

Chakraborty Thakur et al. (2020) in their research pointed a notable increase in internet usage immediately following the lockdown in order to cope with negative emotions and entertain themselves with limited leisure activities.

Singh et al. (2021) in their findings with 1027 participants about the relationship between internet use and stress underscore the need for more investigation into the specific ways that problematic internet use among students affects psychological health and cognitive function.

Fernandes et al. (2021) established connection between PIU and psychological distress, loneliness, and low self-esteem speaks directly to your area of interest in study. The results of this study confirm the necessity for further investigation into the specific impacts of PIU on student's cognitive and psychological well-being.

Awan et al. (2021) in their study provided potential evidence of potential damage to psychological well-being with excessive internet usage amid the pandemic, encompassing the consumption of pornographic content.

Sharma, Singh, and Balhara (2021) looked into how Indians' interest in digital gaming online was impacted by the COVID-19 lockout. It was found that terms linked to online gaming, reward seeking, and other game significantly increased in Robotic surface verification system (Rsvs).

3. Conclusion

The current study revealed that the covid pandemic has taught us a new way of life, where under the umbrella of internet individual's work, education, entertainment, social interactions, marketing all got placed. As virtual dependency become a new life style, the adverse effects of internet use become problematic.

Lockdowns and social distancing caused a sharp decline in direct interaction and inter personal relationship. After effects of covid manifested in terms of distorted psychological wellbeing and other mental health issues among students. Students who were supposed to explore more in the internet showed several psychological issues as a result of isolation and excess use of internet. As young curious minds with ample amount of energy went wasted sitting and scrolling internet leads anxiety and depression in long run. Further family issues, loneliness, low self-esteem, rise in negative emotion, impulsivity and coping difficulties were found to be usual issues among young students across the globe. As, COVID 19 lockdown changed human lives drastically, even after coming back to normalcy (as pre lockdown time) the monotonous student life has not seen much difference which further added to multifaceted Psycho-social and behavioral effects. Considering the seriousness of this rising red flags, active parental involvement, a positive home environment and social outreach activities at school are very much encouraged in this regard.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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