Attachment Style and Internet Addiction Among College Students

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Abstract

Internet users are increasing day by day. It is being a part in every aspects of human life. Internet addiction, especially among youth is a rising issue in our current society. The present study attempts to find out the extent of Internet addiction among college students and to find out whether Internet addiction varies according attachment styles. 191 college students were selected through Convenience sampling. Adult Attachment Scale and Internet Addiction Test were used for data collection. The findings of the study confirm the rising rate of internet addiction among college students. In addition to that it indicated that participants having anxious attachment style have higher Internet Addiction than others.
Keywords: Internet Addiction, Attachment Style.

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Introduction

Internet, one of the fascinating innovations in the history of mankind, is now becoming an integral part in every aspects of human life. From buying groceries to booking tickets online, the world is dependent on the digital world for its smooth functioning. With great power comes great problems, even when internet is a handy tool, the problems caused by it is plenty. The global internet users are on the rise, along with it the problems of internet usage. The excessive usage of internet may lead to the inability to control using internet. This may lead to distress and disruptions in daily life (Shapira, Goldsmith, Keek Jr, Khosla, & McElroy, 2000). This eventually leads to internet addiction. Young (1998) defined internet addiction as a 'failure to stop the desire for excessive Internet use, loss of the importance of the time spent away from the internet, feelings of extreme nervousness when deprived of the internet'.

Research found that Problematic internet use differs according to attachment styles (Odaci & Cikrikci 2014). Anxious attachment attitude towards relationship can contribute to problematic internet use (Fossati et al., 2003).

Senormanci, Senormanci, Guclu and Konkan (2014) in their study identified that individuals who have problematic usage of internet usually have anxious attachment style. Instead of a caregiver they may perceive the use of internet a secure base where they can find comfort and gain relief from their problems. People having anxious attachment style tend to have high need for approval and this eventually lead to increased amount of time spent in online to get approval and acceptance from others (Monacis, De Palo, Griffiths, & Sinatra, 2017). Schimmenti and Caretti (2010) found that individuals having negative preoccupations about relationships use internet to help them from the sense of ineffectiveness in relationships, loneliness and fears about real interactions.

Unlikely, individuals with secure attachment style have positive evaluation about others doesn't experience difficulty in establishing quality relationships with other. This will help them in the appropriate use of internet (Huntsinger & Luecken, 2004). Li and Lin (2014) found negative relationship between secure attachment style and internet addictive behaviours and positive relationship between

insecure attachment style and internet addictive behaviours.

Internet addiction is found to have negative impact on psychological, physiological, academic and social aspects of an individual. But the issues concerning internet addiction has got low public profile. In this regard understanding the prevalence of internet addiction among students will be crucial. This study intends to bring light to the need of giving proper care and cognizance to the young adults regarding this issue. This will help us to plan preventive and precautionary measures to cut down the rising level of internet addiction.

Attachment style which is developed during the childhood itself imparts a great role in our later life including, the way we deal with life situations, the attitude towards relationship and the extent of interpersonal interactions. Identifying the attachment style which is highly prone to internet addiction will help to plan and implement precautionary measures and intervention strategies to reduce the risk. The study intended to promote the importance of developing appropriate attachment styles which requires the conscious efforts of parents from the time of giving birth to their child.

Objectives
- To find out the extent of internet addiction among college students.
- To find out whether internet addiction differs according to attachment style.

Hypotheses
- Internet addiction varies according to attachment styles.

Method
Research Design
The present study attempted to identify the prevalence of Internet Addiction among college students. This study also aimed to find whether internet addiction varies according to the attachment styles. To accomplish this aim Descriptive Survey Research design was adapted.
Sample

The present study was conducted among college students, since they are more prone to Internet Addiction. 216 college students were selected through Convenience sampling method.

Tools used for Data Collection
i) **Adult Attachment Scale (AAS)**
    Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) was developed by Nancy L. Collins (1996). It is an 18 item self report measure scored on a 5 point Likert Scale.
ii) **Internet Addiction Test (IAT)**
    Internet Addiction Test (IAT) was developed by Kimberly Young (1998) to measure the symptoms and severity of Internet Addiction among individuals. It is a 20 item self report measure based on a 5 point Likert Scale.

Procedure of Data Collection
The data was collected through both online and offline survey. Instruments appropriate to the objectives of the study were identified and demographic data sheet was prepared. For online survey, Google Forms were made and circulated among students through email and WhatsApp. For offline survey hard copies of the questionnaires were given to the participants. Informed consent was collected from each participant and confidentiality was assured. Data was collected from 216 students studying in different colleges in Kerala and Tamilnadu. Out of that 191 samples were chosen and coded for further analysis. 25 were rejected due to inadequate data. Statistical methods such as Descriptive statistics and Kruskal – Wallis test were used to test the hypotheses.

Statistical Analysis
Different statistical measures were used to the data. The statistical methods used in this study were:
1. Descriptive statistics were used to find out the extent of internet addiction among participants.
2. Kruskal Wallis Test was used to find the mean difference in Internet Addiction with respect to the Dominant Attachment Style of the participants.

Results
Table I
Extend of Internet Addiction among college students

Internet Addiction Category	Frequency	Percentage
Normal	112	58.6
Mild Internet Addiction	58	30.4
Moderate Internet Addiction	18	9.4
Severe Internet Addiction	3	1.6
Total	191	100.0

Table II
Difference in Internet Addiction with respect to Attachment Styles

	Attachment Style	N	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	P
Internet Addiction	Close	101	85.64	14.97	0.01
	Depend	34	87.24		
	Anxious	56	120.00		
	Total	191			

Table 2 shows Internet Addiction varies according to Attachment style. Majority of the internet addicted participants are found to have anxious attachment style.

Discussion
The findings indicated that 41.3 % of the participants have internet addiction ranging from mild to severe. Internet addiction can create psychological, behavioural, emotional, physiological and health related problems in individuals. Spending more time on internet may reduce the time they spend with their friends, family and others as well as engaging in extracurricular activities. This may adversely affect their social life and the quality of their interpersonal relationship.

The higher level of internet addiction may be because of easy access and affordability of internet among the students. Students can easily get distracted by the fascinating activities waiting in the online world. Recently many universities and colleges are providing free wifi access to their students for academic and research activities. Social media platforms entice the youth with its plethora of opportunities in sharing ideas, connecting with friends and boundless entertaining activities. They may also find internet as a platform where they can explore their inner self without much interruption from the authority figures.

Another important finding of this study is that internet addiction varies according to attachment style. The finding is consistent with the findings of Shin, Kim and Jang (2011); Lin, Ko and Wu (2011); Senormanci, Senormanci, Guclu and Konkan (2014). Majority of the participants with anxious attachment style is

found to have higher internet addiction than others. Anxiously attached individuals are found to have received non responsive, inconsistent and harsh parenting (Bridges & Grolnick, 1995). As noted by Bowlby (1973) this may lead to the development of negative preoccupations towards relationships. Anxiously attached individual tend to be clingy and attention seeking. This might be a reason for them to over relay on internet for gratifying their needs which they were not able to fulfill in offline situations.

They may generally have self doubt and negative evaluations about themselves. This might be because of the emotionally unstable and distant parenting received from their parents. Such individual shows emotionally dependent on others and they seek approval and reassurance from others (Bartholomew, 1990). These characteristics may lead them to create more relationships through cyberspace inorder protect them from the sense of ineffectiveness in relationships. Because of these factors they may prefer online interaction over face to face interaction which in turn contributes to excessive use of internet. They may perceive internet as less risky and less complex than offline interactions.

Implications

Internet addiction can affect decision making, emotion regulation, impulse control and social intelligence of an individual. It is found to have close association with anxiety, depression and loneliness. People who spend a lot of time in virtual world may experience a distance from the real world. Such individual tends to avoid face to face interaction which gradually leads to social withdrawal. Compulsive internet users tend to have an urge to check internet or social media recurrently. Failure to do that may create mental frustration and distress. These frustrations may get expressed in different forms such as anger, psychomotor agitation, irritability, sadness and anergia.

Physiological problems such as sleep disturbances, sensory motor coordination and psychomotor agitation is associated with internet addiction. Individuals who spend excessive time in internet tend to consume junk foods during their online activities. This can lead to physiological problems such as diabetics, increased blood pressure, obesity and gastric issues. Looking at digital screens for a long time can create disturbances in eyes such as eyestrain and blurred vision. Excessive usage of internet through devices smart phones which emit harmful radiations can create serious issues such as cancer and infertility.

Internet addiction may be detrimental since it leads to the deterioration of academic motivation and classroom performance which eventually results in poor academic achievement. Constant checking of social media may distract the students from academic activities. Students who spend a lot of time in internet during late night may feel sleepy at day time. Because of this they may find it difficult to attend and concentrate in the class hours. Compulsive internet users may postpone their academic activities in order to spend more time online. Excessive internet use can also reduce the time spend with peers, this can contribute to poor relationship and can create adjustmental problems in educational institution.

Spending more time online may reduce the time spend with family which in turn affect the interpersonal communication, quality of relationship among the family members and shrink the commitment among family members. Lack of commitment among family members can hamper the quality of life of each member. Conflicts may remain unresolved and eventually this can lead to familial discord. Internet addiction among parents can affect the parent child relationship too.
Excessive usage of internet can also affect the social interactions and reduce participation in social activities. This will adversely affect the social relationships of an individual and may cause isolation from real society.

Recommendations

In order to address the issues concerning internet addiction proper actions should be taken immediately. Since it is associated with

various realms of human life multi sectoral approach will be necessary for the effective management of the concerned issue. Educational seminars and lectures should be provided regarding the potential harmful effect of internet addiction and the importance of its prevention. Educational institutions should implement strategies to promote interpersonal interaction among students. Providing open space for student gathering, organizing students circle for the sharing of ideas and opinions regarding contemporary issues. Children, adolescents and young adults can be motivated to channelize their energy in productive ways. Skills training should be provided on boosting self esteem, self regulation, abstinence from addictive online applications and identification of maladaptive thoughts leading to internet addiction. Encouragement of positive personality traits, interpersonal sensitivity, reinforcement of emotional intelligence and social competence will be beneficial.

Since individuals having anxious attachment style are found to be more prone to internet addiction, identifying anxiously attached individuals and providing precautionary measures for them will be beneficial. Psychologists should be posted in each school; through proper assessment anxiously attached individuals can be identified. This may help to prevent the chances of developing internet addiction among these highly susceptible individuals. As children who received inconsistent and insensitive caring are more likely to develop anxious attachment style, parents should be given proper awareness on the importance of consistent and responsive care giving, especially in the early developmental period. Training and Group counselling can be organized for pregnant women and new mothers for enhancing their parenting skills.

Further researches should be done to find effective preventive strategies and precautionary measures to cut done the rising level of internet addiction. Policy makers should implement intervention strategies in organizational and educational level.

Conclusion

The present study identified 41.3% of the participants as having internet addiction. Significant difference in internet addiction with respect to attachment style is found and anxious attachment styles have higher internet addiction than other attachment styles. Based on the findings, the implications were discussed and few recommendations were put forwarded.

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