

# A Prospective Study on Internet Addiction in Young Adults

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## Abstract:

Internet addiction has become an important issue in young population who are at risk of the adverse effects of internet addiction due to their high levels of internet use for social networking, gaming, streaming, and other online activities. Knowing the factors responsible for the development of internet Addiction can be useful for both prevention and treatment as well as targeted intervention for this type of addiction. This study was conducted to determine prevalence of Internet addiction among young population, its associated factors and analysing the possible differences related to gender.

This cross-sectional study was conducted on young adults of 18-24 years age studying at Nims, university, Jaipur, Rajasthan during the months of October and November 2023. Predefined questionnaire of young etal was used to capture the data pertaining to internet addiction among the study population. A total of 141 participants between 18 years and 34 years of both genders were selected (247 males and 207 females) for the study.

In the present study among the 24 participants, 67% were females and 33% were males. Overall internet addiction including severe and moderate degree was more than 50% which was higher than previous studies. Impact of internet addiction was observed in form of

Reduced productivity at work, loss of sleep and depression/mood swings etc

## INTRODUCTION

Psychoactive substance dependence or addiction is defined as lack of control. Concept of non-substance or “behavioral” addictions, applies to a range of behaviours that are separate from substance abuse i.e., syndromes similar to substance dependence but with a different behavioural focus.[1]. There is scientific and clinical heuristic value to this theory but still it remains controversial [2].

The inclusion of certain behavioural, or non-substance addictions, such as gambling, internet gaming, internet use in general, sex, eating, shopping, and exercise in some of the recognised mental behaviours was considered by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). However, only gambling disorder has been included in the DSM-5 [3,4].

In the last few years computer and internet use have become inseparable parts of our life. The number of ours one uses internet has increased tremendously. Internet is one of the best methods of communication, information and also various types of entertainment. It is widely being used by educated as well as uneducated people for various activities. [5,6] Internet Addiction The psychologists from like China and South Korea have coined a new term ie internet addiction disorder (IAD) for the prolonged use of internet for various activities and called it a menace and advocate for support, education, research and treatment

for IAD. In 1996 the concept of IAD was introduced first time by Kimberly Young [7], who recommended the inclusion of IAD in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), 4th ed [8].

Some of the countries have studied the problematic use of internet or internet addiction extensively and has been found to be associated with negative health outcomes in young population. [9,10]

IAD may be defined as uncontrolled prolonged use of internet. IAD negatively impacts the mental health and cognitive behavior of an individual, leading to affecting the personal life. (Poon 2018). IAD can have several effects such as decreased academic performance, job productivity, mood changes, spending less time with family affecting interpersonal relationships, and withdrawal symptoms such as anxiety and anger etc. when not engaged in online activities, silence that is ignoring all other things and internet use becoming the most important thing in life and relapse of addictive behavior even after certain period of abstinence [11]

Internet addiction has become an important issue in young population who are at risk of the adverse effects of internet addiction due to their high levels of internet use for social networking, gaming, streaming, and other online activities. In order, to avoid the negative consequences of IAD one should have balance between online and offline activities. [12] If used judiciously internet can have positive impact on academic performance, job performance and career advancement, develop new relationships and used for entertainment with friends and family.

As internet addiction is mainly affecting the young population who are the future of the society, country and the world at large as they will be leaders, innovators and workforce; it is utmost important to pay attention to the problem in this age group.

Young adults and adolescents use online activities as a way of escaping from the real-life situations and challenges [13]. During this age stress related to career development is high and they may be using online activities as coping mechanism with stress. However, this type of coping mechanisms is associated with poor psychological health such as anxiety and distress. [14] Not only mental health it is also associated with poor physical health due to reduced physical activities because of more time spent in online activities. Walker et al conducted research and reported that since internet addiction lacked a chemical dependence and was like an obsessive and compulsive behaviour, and resembled to gambling addiction and compulsive shopping. [15] Young in research concluded that internet users become addicted to certain applications of internet. [16] It is said that individuals with low self-confidence with poor social skills create virtual world using internet as it provides anonymity to them. In olden days it was believed that males are at more risk of developing internet addiction but now it is proved that internet addiction results due to personality type and the specific internet application by an individual due to which everyone with overuse of internet is at risk of internet addiction. [17]

Psychological research has been tremendously influenced by the exponential growth and use of internet in the last decade with focus on understanding the role of internet in communication and interpersonal behaviour of an individual [18]. Knowing the factors responsible for the development of internet Addiction can be useful for both prevention and treatment as well as targeted intervention for this type of addiction. The objective of this study was to determine prevalence of Internet addiction among young population, its associated factors and analysing the possible differences related to gender.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS:**

This cross-sectional study was conducted on young adults of 18-24 years age studying at Nims, University, Jaipur, Rajasthan during the months of October and November 2023 . Predefined questionnaire of young

etal was used to determine the presence or absence of addiction.

**INCLUSION CRITERIA**

Individual of ages 18 and 34 years of both genders regularly using internet were included in the study.

**EXCLUSION CRITERIA**

Students less than 18 and more than 34 years of age who were not using internet were excluded.

Consent to participate in the study: The aims of the investigation and the nature of the study were fully explained to the participants in writing in the google form, and individuals who gave written consent were included in the study.

**STATISTICAL ANALYSIS**

IBM SPSS version 23 statistical package software was used for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics like frequencies and proportions were calculated. The chi-square test was used to determine the Degrees of association between the outcome variable and independent variables. Multiple logistic regression analyses were to explore the strength of association. Results with p values of < 0.05 were considered to be statistically significant.

**RESULTS:**

**Table 1: Regression statistics depicted the following parameters of online addiction based on age**

Parameters	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat
Stay online longer	0.300	0.190	1.576
Excitement to intimacy	-0.110	0.183	-0.598
New relationships	0.654	0.217	3.008
Job performance or productivity affected	-0.336	0.161	-2.086
Block disturbing thoughts soothing thoughts	-0.196	0.131	-1.493
Thought block	-0.156	0.165	-0.944
Anger	0.083	0.211	0.392
Sleep disturbance	-0.100	0.155	-0.642
Depressed, moody, or nervous	-0.178	0.228	-0.782

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics depicted the following parameters of online addiction based on age**

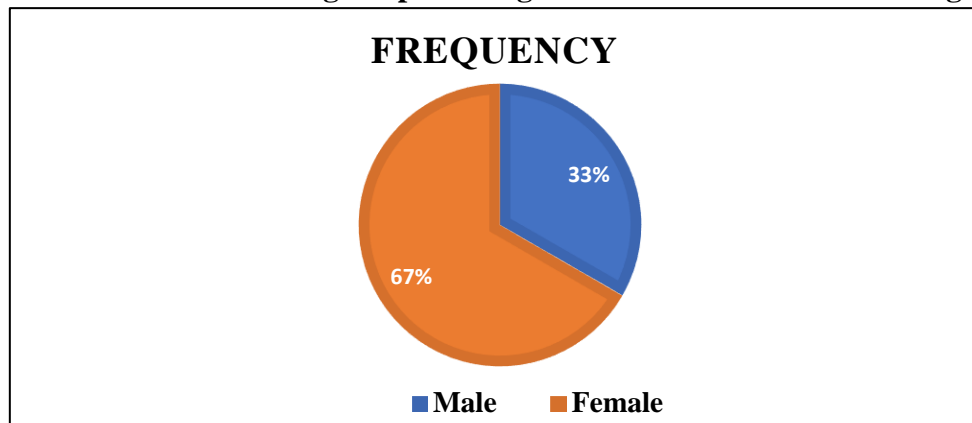
	Mean	Standard Error	Standard Deviation
Stay online longer	2.936	0.097	1.154
Excitement to intimacy	1.730	0.094	1.120
New relationships	1.539	0.081	0.960
Job performance or productivity affected	2.092	0.105	1.242
Block disturbing thoughts soothing thoughts	2.745	0.117	1.386
Thought block	2.546	0.106	1.262
Anger	1.993	0.094	1.112
Sleep disturbance	2.496	0.114	1.356

Depressed, moody, or nervous	1.801	0.087	1.037
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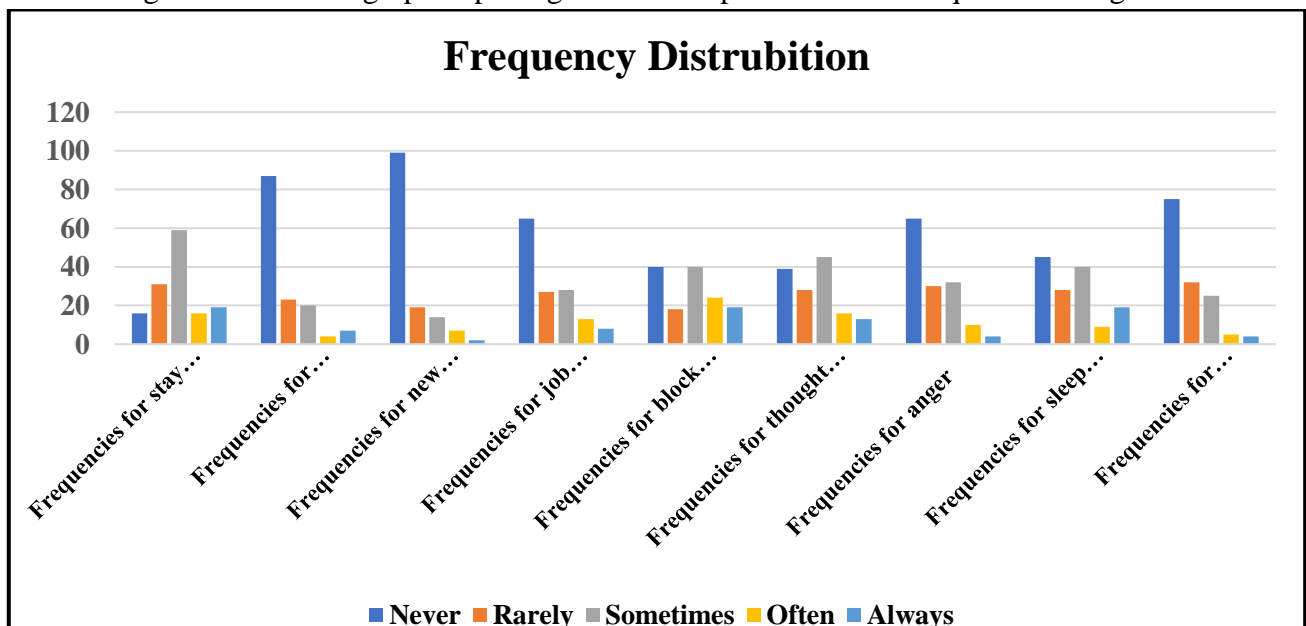
**Table 3: Regression statistics depicted the following parameters of online addiction based on gender.**

Parameters	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat
Stay online longer	1.709	0.122	13.968
Excitement to intimacy	0.075	0.042	1.776
New relationships	-0.026	0.041	-0.632
Job performance or productivity affected	-0.168	0.048	-3.465
Block disturbing thoughts soothing thoughts	0.083	0.036	2.306
Thought block	0.020	0.029	0.700
Anger	0.002	0.037	0.065
Sleep disturbance	-0.057	0.047	-1.209
Depressed, moody, or nervous	-0.055	0.035	-1.578

**Figure -1: Pie chart showing the percentage of online addiction based on gender**



**Figure -2: Column graph depicting the various parameters on frequencies for gender**



It is a prospective study conducted on 141 young adults. Of the 141 participants, 67% were females and 33% were males. The age of the participants ranged from 18-30 years. Highest number of participants were from the age group 22 (33 participants) years and the lowest number of participants were aged 18 years (3 participants). Among the 141 participants, 19% always stayed online longer than intended. Whereas 59% stayed online longer than intended sometimes.

## DISCUSSION

Internet is a wonderful source of learning, communication and entertainment. Overall internet addiction including severe and moderate degree was more than 50% which was higher than previous studies. In a study from Bangladesh overall prevalence of IA was 27.1%. [5] Different prevalence rates of internet addiction varying in relation to sociodemographic and internet-use related variables is reported all around the world.

Internet addiction in Middle East countries like Jordan was (40%) [19] and in Iran (39.6%) [17]. The internet addiction in European countries was much lower such as in British (18.3%) [18] and Taiwanese samples (17.4%) [20]. Besides cultural factors, these differences may be attributed to variations in the diagnostic criteria and assessment questionnaires used for diagnosis. In addition, studies often use highly selective samples of online surveys. [5]

However, over use of internet can cause physical and mental health issues among users. In the present study 24.83% had addiction among which 11.3% had moderate addiction whereas 13.4% had severe addiction. In a study by Vandana et al. 53.8% of the participants had moderate addiction whereas 7.7% had severe internet addiction. Their findings are in contradiction to our study [21]. In the present study among the 24 participants, 67% were females and 33% were males. In a study from Bangladesh 45.6% were females whereas 54.4% were males. In a study from Bangladesh Males were more prone to internet addiction (31.58%) than females (21.74%), which corresponds with previous literatures [5,22,23]. It may be because males are generally more passionate regarding knowing the unknown or exploring new inventions or they are usually more attracted to addictive objects such as pornography, cybersex, and online gaming compared with the female [5]. In their study 70% participants were from age group 19-25 years and 30% from age group 25-35 years. The age of the participants in our study ranged from 18-30 years with the highest number of participants belonged to 22 years of age (23.4%).

In a study by Deepali Gupta et al. Highest number of participants were of age group 22 years. [24]

A study from Bangladesh reported addiction in 27% of study subjects (Tubayesha Hassan et al. 5) In our study 24.8% of the study population frequently remained online longer than intended. This is lower than the findings of Study by Deepali Gupta et al. wherein 38.5% of study population frequently remained online longer than intended. Most of the internet addiction among young adults aged 22 years could be due to solving identity crises, affirming their attitudes, and establish social links and professional aims. In our study, 33% of the participants were females whereas 67% were males. This is similar to the study conducted by Deepali Gupta et al. In their study, 61.5% study population were female followed by 37% males. [24] In some studies men were at higher risk than women [26,25] Other studies reported that females had higher internet addiction than men [26]. Few studies did not report any significant difference in internet addiction between male and females [27]

In the current study 14.89% participants postponed their work thus reducing productivity whereas 46% never postponed their work. In a study by Deepali Gupta et al. 33% population's productivity was rarely

affected and 2.5% of the population always let their productivity be affected. [24]

People addicted to internet find the internet to be much more interesting pastime than other activities. Nowadays even at workplaces individuals indulge in social media interaction, gaming and online shopping which affects their productivity. People tend to check messages very frequently thus neglecting their important work.

One study reported that 41% study subjects rarely made relations online and 4% always made online relations.[24] In the present study 4.3% study participants always developed new relations and 34.7% did not make new relation online. Staying over social media longer than usual gives an opportunity to meet and interact with new people, therefore people with similar thinking and ideas may develop new relations. Many of the internet addicted individuals live in isolation neglecting the real world and true relations without any physical contact.

Using internet to soothe their thoughts is one of the coping strategies among depressed individuals or people with disturbing thoughts. In a study 27% of the population rarely lost sleep whereas 9% remained over the internet exploring and browsing and never lost sleep.[24] In our study 31.9% never lost sleep but 13.4% study subjects always lost sleep and remained online.

Internet has several effects on psychosocial wellbeing of an individual. Internet addiction is associated with alcohol abuse, depression, anxiety and stress [28-31]. In a longitudinal study, Chinese high school students with moderate to severe risk of Internet addiction had 2.5 times more risk to develop depressive symptoms. Internet addiction is associated with lower academic and professional performance. In our study 6.38% of the study group developed depression/mood swings while 53% did not develop depression/mood swings etc. due to internet addiction.

Addicted people spend more time online than with their friends and family. It leads to loss of job problematic marital and poor academic performance, poor relation with children and superiors at office [32-34].

## CONCLUSION

Internet is an important tool, has created great impact and transformed human life in many dimensions especially in the field of education, research, entertainment and so many other domains. Internet also caused negative impact on humans' life by reducing the physical activities and lethargic behaviour due to technology driven task completion. It also caused significant number of young adults addicted and causing deterioration in their quality of life.

In present era, life without internet is difficult but not impossible. If people use internet with caution it can serve as a boon to mankind. If it is misused it may be a tool of disaster.

Limitations of the study: Data collection was based on self-reporting, which is usually prone to recall bias is a limitation of this study. Not consideration of psychological factors influencing Internet addiction was another limitation of this study

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