
INTERVENTIONS FOR INTERNET ADDICTION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE: A REVIEW OF EVIDENCE AND STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Internet addiction has become an increasing psychological and educational concern among adolescents and young adults due to excessive use of smartphones, social media, online gaming, and digital platforms. Problematic internet use negatively affects mental health, academic performance, sleep quality, and social relationships. This review paper examines various interventions used to reduce internet addiction among young people. The study is based on a review of previous literature focusing on Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT), family-based interventions, school-based awareness programs, mindfulness techniques, and technology-assisted approaches. The findings indicate that CBT, parental monitoring, counselling, and psychoeducational programs are effective in reducing problematic internet use and promoting healthy digital behaviour. The paper concludes that collaborative efforts from parents, educators, counsellors, and policymakers are essential for preventing and managing internet addiction among young people.

KEYWORDS: Internet Addiction; Adolescents; Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy; Digital Addiction; Mental Health; School-Based Interventions; Young People.

1.0. INTRODUCTION

The internet has become one of the most important technological developments of the modern era. It has significantly transformed communication, education, entertainment, business, and social interaction across the world. Young people, particularly adolescents and university students, are among the most active internet users because of increasing dependence on smartphones, social networking sites, online gaming, and digital learning

platforms. Although the internet provides numerous educational and social advantages, excessive and uncontrolled use may lead to problematic behavioural patterns commonly known as internet addiction (Young, 1998).

Internet addiction refers to excessive or poorly controlled internet use that negatively affects an individual's psychological, academic, social, and occupational functioning (Beard & Wolf, 2001). Researchers have also used terms such as problematic internet use and compulsive internet use to explain this phenomenon (Davis, 2001; Griffiths, 2005). According to Griffiths (2005), internet addiction shares several characteristics with behavioural addictions, including salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, and relapse.

Internationally, internet addiction has emerged as a serious public health concern among adolescents and young adults. Studies conducted in different countries have shown that excessive internet use is associated with anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleep disturbances, poor academic performance, and reduced social interaction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Cheng & Li, 2014). Asian countries such as China and South Korea have reported particularly high prevalence rates because of extensive online gaming culture, academic pressure, and widespread internet accessibility (Kuss, Griffiths, Karila, & Billieux, 2014).

From the Indian perspective, internet addiction has become an emerging issue among school and college students due to affordable smartphones, rapid digitalization, and low-cost internet services. India currently has one of the largest populations of internet users in the world, and adolescents constitute a major proportion of active users. Studies conducted among Indian adolescents and university students revealed that excessive internet use is associated with stress, emotional instability, academic procrastination, poor sleep quality, and reduced concentration (Goel, Subramanyam, & Kamath, 2013). Research by Sharma, Benegal, and Rao (2013) also highlighted that problematic internet use among Indian youth negatively affects mental health, interpersonal relationships, and academic engagement. Similarly, Nalwa and Anand (2003) found that Indian students with higher internet dependency often experienced loneliness, reduced social interaction, and poor time management. Furthermore, studies conducted in different Indian educational settings reported that social media addiction and online gaming are becoming increasingly common among college students and adolescents (Bhatia, Rajpoot, & Dwivedi, 2016; Jain et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic further increased students' dependence on online education and virtual communication, leading to greater screen exposure and problematic internet use.

Considering the increasing prevalence and negative consequences of internet addiction, there is a growing need to identify effective intervention strategies. Therefore, the present review paper aims to examine evidence-based interventions and strategies for reducing internet addiction among young people.

2.0 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify different types of interventions used to address internet addiction among young people.
2. To examine the effectiveness of psychological, family-based, school-based, and technology-assisted interventions.
3. To evaluate evidence from previous studies regarding intervention outcomes.
4. To suggest practical recommendations for educational institutions, families, counsellors, and policymakers.
5. To identify future research directions related to internet addiction interventions.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a narrative literature review approach. Relevant studies were collected from online academic databases including Google Scholar, PubMed, ERIC, and Scopus etc.

The review included peer-reviewed journal articles, research papers, review studies, and intervention-based studies published. Studies focusing on adolescents, students, and young adults aged between 12 and 25 years were considered for inclusion.

The following keywords were used during the search process:

- Internet addiction
- Problematic internet use
- Young adults
- Adolescents
- Cognitive behavioural therapy
- Family intervention
- School-based intervention
- Digital addiction
- Online counselling

The selected studies were analysed according to the following aspects:

- Study design
- Sample characteristics
- Intervention type
- Duration of intervention
- Assessment tools used
- Outcomes and effectiveness
- Limitations of the study

4.0 Concept of Internet Addiction

Internet addiction refers to excessive and uncontrolled use of the internet that negatively affects an individual's daily life, psychological well-being, and social functioning (Young, 1998). It is considered a behavioural addiction characterized by compulsive internet use, inability to control online activities, and continued usage despite harmful consequences (Griffiths, 2005).

Common symptoms of internet addiction include excessive time spent online, inability to reduce internet use, emotional distress when offline, neglect of academic or family responsibilities, sleep disturbances, and preference for online interaction over face-to-face communication (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012). Different forms of internet addiction include social media addiction, online gaming addiction, video streaming addiction, and compulsive information seeking (Davis, 2001).

Research studies have shown that internet addiction is associated with anxiety, depression, stress, loneliness, and low self-esteem among adolescents and young adults (Cheng & Li, 2014). Therefore, it has become an important psychological and educational concern in modern society.

5.0 FINDINGS

The review of previous studies indicates that internet addiction among young people has become an increasing psychological, educational, and social concern globally as well as in India. Different intervention strategies have been implemented to reduce problematic internet use among adolescents and young adults. The findings suggest that psychological interventions, family support, school-based awareness programs, and technology-assisted strategies are among the most effective approaches for reducing internet addiction symptoms

(Young, 2007; Kuss & Griffiths, 2012). Indian studies also reported that excessive internet use among students is associated with anxiety, stress, poor academic performance, and reduced social interaction (Goel, Subramanyam, & Kamath, 2013; Sharma et al., 2018)

5.1. Psychological/Cognitive-behavioural Interventions

Psychological interventions, particularly Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT), have been widely used to treat internet addiction among adolescents and young adults. CBT focuses on identifying maladaptive thoughts and behaviours related to excessive internet use and developing self-control, emotional regulation, and time-management skills (Young, 2007). Studies revealed that CBT significantly reduces compulsive internet use, anxiety, depression, and emotional distress among students (King et al., 2011).

Mindfulness-based interventions, meditation, and counselling programs were also found effective in improving attention control and reducing stress associated with problematic internet use (Li et al., 2021). Indian researchers reported that counselling and psychoeducational interventions positively influence students' emotional stability and digital behaviour (Sharma & Rao, 2018).

5.2. Family- and Parent-Based Interventions

Family-based interventions emphasize parental monitoring, family communication, emotional support, and healthy digital habits. Studies found that supportive family relationships and proper screen-time management reduce problematic internet use among adolescents (Yu & Shek, 2013). Parents who establish clear internet usage rules and encourage offline activities help children maintain balanced digital behaviour.

Indian studies also highlighted that lack of parental supervision and family conflict contribute significantly to internet addiction among adolescents (Goel et al., 2013). Family counselling programs improve parent-child interaction and reduce emotional dependence on online activities.

5.3. School- and Community-Based Interventions

School- and community-based interventions focus mainly on prevention and awareness. Educational institutions organize workshops, seminars, counselling sessions, and digital literacy programs to educate students about healthy internet usage (Walther, Hanewinkel, & Morgenstern, 2014). Teachers and school counsellors also play an important role in identifying students at risk of internet addiction.

Indian educational studies reported that awareness programs and psychoeducational sessions significantly improve students' understanding of healthy digital behaviour and reduce

excessive screen time (Bhatia, Rajpoot, & Dwivedi, 2016). Peer-group discussions and extracurricular activities also positively influence students' social adjustment and emotional well-being.

5.4. Digital/Technology-Assisted Interventions

Technology-assisted interventions include screen-time monitoring applications, website blockers, online counselling, teletherapy, and digital detox programs. These interventions help individuals monitor internet usage patterns and reduce excessive online engagement (Rooke & Thorsteinsson, 2018).

Online CBT modules and mobile applications were found useful in improving self-regulation among adolescents and university students. During the COVID-19 pandemic, tele-counselling and virtual mental health services became increasingly important in India and other countries. However, concerns regarding privacy, accessibility, and long-term effectiveness remain significant challenges.

5.5. Physical Activity and Alternative Activities

Participation in sports, physical exercise, cultural programs, and extracurricular activities was found effective in reducing internet addiction symptoms. Physical activity improves mental health, reduces stress, and promotes social interaction among young people (Koc, 2011).

Studies conducted in India reported that students involved in outdoor games, creative hobbies, and social activities showed lower levels of problematic internet use compared to students with sedentary lifestyles (Jain et al., 2020). Replacing screen time with productive offline activities helps adolescents maintain healthier routines and social relationships.

5.6. Comparing Effectiveness Across Studies

Comparative findings from previous studies suggest that CBT-based interventions are among the most effective approaches for reducing internet addiction symptoms (Young, 2007). Family-based interventions are particularly effective for adolescents because parental involvement influences behavioural regulation and emotional support (Yu & Shek, 2013).

School-based programs are mainly preventive and effective in increasing awareness regarding healthy internet use. Technology-assisted interventions showed promising short-term results; however, long-term effectiveness remains uncertain. Studies further indicate that combined interventions involving counselling, parental support, awareness education, and behavioural monitoring produce better outcomes than isolated interventions (King et al., 2011).

6.0. DISCUSSION

The findings of the present review indicate that internet addiction among young people is a multidimensional psychological and social issue requiring comprehensive intervention strategies. Psychological interventions, particularly CBT, demonstrated strong effectiveness in reducing compulsive internet behaviour and improving emotional regulation. Family involvement and parental monitoring also significantly contribute to healthier internet usage patterns among adolescents.

In the Indian context, increased smartphone accessibility, low-cost internet services, and online educational systems have intensified internet exposure among students. Indian studies revealed that internet addiction negatively affects academic performance, mental health, sleep quality, and interpersonal relationships (Goel et al., 2013; Sharma et al., 2018). School- and community-based awareness programs therefore become essential preventive strategies.

However, several reviewed studies had limitations such as small sample sizes, self-report measures, and lack of long-term follow-up. Therefore, further research is needed to examine long-term intervention effectiveness across different cultural and educational settings.

7.0. Recommendations / Practical Implications

Educational institutions should introduce digital literacy and healthy screen-time management programs within the curriculum. Teachers and counsellors should identify students at risk of internet addiction and provide counselling support. Parents should establish clear internet usage rules, encourage offline activities, and maintain healthy communication with children.

Mental health professionals should use standardized screening tools such as the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) and organize CBT-based intervention programs for adolescents and young adults. Policymakers should also include digital well-being education in school and university programs to promote responsible internet use.

8.0. Future Research Directions

Future studies should focus on long-term intervention outcomes and comparative effectiveness of different intervention strategies such as CBT, family therapy, and school-based programs. More research is also needed in rural and urban Indian settings to understand cultural and socioeconomic differences related to internet addiction.

Researchers should conduct longitudinal and experimental studies using larger samples and standardized tools to improve the reliability and generalizability of findings. Future studies

may also explore the impact of artificial intelligence, virtual learning, and social media algorithms on problematic internet use among adolescents and university students.

9.0. CONCLUSION

Internet addiction has emerged as a major psychological, educational, and social concern among young people in the digital era. Excessive internet use negatively affects mental health, academic achievement, physical well-being, and interpersonal relationships. The present review indicates that psychological interventions, particularly CBT, along with family-based, school-based, and technology-assisted interventions, are effective in reducing problematic internet use among adolescents and young adults.

Indian studies also highlighted the growing impact of internet addiction among students due to increasing smartphone accessibility and digital dependence. Therefore, collaborative efforts involving educators, parents, counsellors, mental health professionals, and policymakers are necessary to promote healthy digital behaviour and reduce internet addiction among young people.

10.0. REFERENCES

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