

Internet Addiction and Teens' Vulnerability

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Abstracts

The main aim of the study was to assess the knowledge of primary school teachers and effectiveness of computer assisted planned teaching program on health appraisal of school children in selected schools of Dhamtari District, Chhattisgarh. Keeping the objectives of the study in view, the researcher selected one group pretest and post-test pre-experimental design. The study was carried out in a group of 50 primary school teachers from selected schools of Dhamtari Chhattisgarh, selected by non-probability purposive sampling and a self-structured questionnaire was administered to assess the knowledge of primary school teachers. After pre-test a computer assisted planned teaching program on health appraisal of school children was administered. Data collection was analyzed by using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results of the study revealed that primary school teachers have average knowledge

Keywords: Health Appraisal of School Children; Primary School Teacher.

Introduction

Increased diffusion of the Internet enabled speedy and effective communication. According to various reports and researches, the addiction to internet is increasing rapidly among all the age groups. The addiction to internet can be described as a constant desire to stay online even though when there is no real need. It thus indicates that there is a serious psychic problem. It is also proved that obsession to internet is significantly altering brain's perception for internet use. People are so dependent that they are anxious when offline. Internet gives a sense of connectivity and also a source of entertainment. It facilitates the users to relieve their stress or pass their free time on it (Thomée, Härenstam, & Hagberg, 2011). People staying online almost all the times e.g. while at work time, with family or even when with friends. Psychiatrists believe that internet addiction is becoming one of the biggest non-drug addictions in the next century [1].

Children get approval from their parents for internet use for academic purpose but, license to use internet for academic purpose provides opportunity to access other online activities. Prolong online stay discourages the children to take part in various healthful activities which carry developmental value to physical and mental health. Teenagers are also vulnerable to internet addiction, which may have negative impact on their physical health, social relationships, psychological temperament as well as academic performance.

Teens between the ages of 13 - 19 years old go through a stage known as "Identity versus Role Confusion" (Erikson, 1963). The online world is also another viable option for the youth to seek out their self-identity. They may use the Internet as a platform to establish a sense of self (Erikson, 1963) and experiment with different roles and behaviours. Hence it is through this phase which shapes the youth's identity which last into their later years [2].

How to Identify the Child with Internet Addiction

Be observant for the 4 'C's of internet addictions,

- *Craving: Having continuous desire to use internet—* whether the child is searching for opportunities to go online, giving up non-technological tasks, frequent excuses for using internet, doing advocacy for internet use, most of the time talking about various types of gadgets with internet access and apps.
- *Control: Unable to reduce the time for internet use—* the child having the desire to stay online longer, unable to log out, the time spent on internet going on increasing day by day to activate mood, get excitement, overcome boredom.
- *Compulsion: Having strong urge to use internet—* though other activities are available to carry out, but the child prefers to do online activities only.
- *Consequences: Having noticeable problems due to prolonged online stay—* physical problems e.g. headache, neck pain, back pain, eye problems, sleep disturbances, eating fast food; psychological problems e.g. not feeling good in the absence of internet, experiencing irritability, anger, low mood etc.; social problems e.g. prefer to spend time with gadgets, avoid offline contacts, family, friends, avoid doing outdoor activities; academic problems e.g. distraction, problems in attention/concentration etc. Withdrawal Symptoms - tends to temper tantrums, irritability, anger and exhibit violent behaviors during unavailability of online activities.

Underlying Triggers (The Teens' Factors)

The 3 'P's can lead to such addiction

- ⊙ *Psychological Factors*
- Having low mood, low confidence, nervousness, sad mood, feelings of loneliness, boredom
- Need for excitement and experimentation as staying online is very funny and engaging because internet facilitates gaming, chatting on social networking sites, online shopping, internet gambling, pornography etc.
- Provides secure feelings because of anonymity
- An arena for sexual exploration
- To establish a sense of belongingness and acceptance with their friends

- Escape/Emotional release and catharsis
- Immediate gratification that meets the demands of the fast-paced lifestyles
- Search for identity, thus like to interact with others independently and internet facilitates in such need
- Internet helps in maintaining the romantic relationships by sharing photographs, video calling etc.

⊙ *Personality Factors*

- Being shy and introvert/extrovert need for recognition and approval

⊙ *Parenting Factors*

- Poor Inter Personal Relationship and family support. Decreased social life
- Absence of supervision during free time, some time may be because of both parents working, single parent.
- Frequent use of technology by parents.

Impact on Life

⊙ *Physical Problems*

- *Overweight* due to reduced physical activity, eating unhealthy food.
- *Pains and aches* e.g. stiffness, burning feeling and pain in hands due to continuous holding the mouse and moving the finger on the keyboard, headache, neck pain, back pain due to sitting in the same position for hours.
- *Eye problems* e.g. dryness and redness of eye and irritation etc. due to continuous staring at the computer screen.
- *Sleep deficit* e.g. disturbed fragmented sleep patterns due to late night logins, day time drowsiness, lethargic etc.
- *Poor performance of daily activities* e.g. Poor personal hygiene as showers, face washing, brushing hair and teeth, all get less priority.

⊙ *Psychosocial/Behavioural Problems*

- *Poor IPR/communications:* Poor Inter Personal Relationship, reduced communication, lack of cooperation and inability to build relationship, withdrawal from social activities, hiding feelings

from family and friends, likes isolation, poor participation in group activities, and lack of interest in social gathering etc.

- *Poor eating habits:* Eating irregularities, skipping meal, eating unhealthy food because don't want to take time to eat properly, rather than eating healthy, balanced meals, eat food that is quick and usually unhealthy.
- *Low frustration tolerance level:* Temper tantrum, irritable, aggressive, abusive, getting irritated easily if anyone interfere in internet use.
- *Poor time management:* Facing time management problem as maximum time spending in online activities.
- *Poor study performance among students:* Spending more time in "searching" than actually completing assignments, incomplete or missing assignments, doing assignments by simply copying and pasting contents thus, losing the skill of writing an essay, handwriting become worsen, facing difficulty in writing in exams, poor attention span, inability to concentrate on real life instruction, absenteeism, skipping classes to stay online, decreased intellectual ability, reduces thinking ability, grades / scores begin to decline.

⊙ *Struggles of Parents if Children become Internet Addicted*

Having children who are addicted to the Internet can be very stressful for the parents. They try to restrain their children's time spent on staying online, but for one reason or another, nothing work. They often are frustrated, stressed, scared, angry, and/or depressed. They have no energy left and they just want to give up. Some struggles that they may face are shown as below:

- *Self-Blaming.* Parents may have the tendency for self-blaming for not doing enough with their children and for allowing them to be addicted to the Internet.
- *Anger.* Parents may display acts of anger such as snatching away the gadgets, abruptly turning off the home WIFI connection, verbal or/and physical abuse. In extreme cases, they might resort to changing locks at home and withholding the keys in an attempt to keep the children at home.
- *Helplessness and Fatigue.* In certain situations, parents may feel helpless, fatigue and demoralized when all their efforts come to failure.
- *Anxiety.* Seeing children addicted to internet, parents may try a number of actions without considering the consequences but with the same end goal in mind and that is to attempt to break their children's addiction cycle.
- *Denial.* Some parents totally deny and disregard the existence of Internet Addiction on their children and attempt to lead lives as normal as possible.

Strategic Management

⊙ *Education for the Teens*

- Make the teens clear that for internet use, their other activities should not be suffered. Fix time slot for all daily activities e.g. sleep wake time, meal time, bath, study etc. Make a list of items, want to search online, to avoid unwanted search. Practice no technology during meal, driving, when talking to someone in person, during sleep time.
- Avoid prolong sitting in front of the computer. Take regular computer breaks, get up from the computer at regular intervals, use an alarm as reminder that it is time to go and see what a family member is doing in the next room. Computer chair must be adjustable with arm rest and full back support. Table height must be normal. Height of chair should be so adjusted that the eyes should focus at the middle of the monitor. Maintain proper posture while working on computer. Use of keyboard, mouse properly or by wearing a wrist-guard while working on the computer. The keyboard should be placed at approximately elbow height, slightly tilted while typing on the keyboard or using mouse. Keep the wrist straight, arm bent at right angle and at the side of the body. While using the mouse, keep the shoulder and arm in a relaxed position and close to the body. Use as little force as possible while using keyboard and mouse. It helps in preventing pains and aches in various parts of the body due to sitting in the same position. In severe case consult a doctor.
- Try to increase physical activity levels. Add some exercise to daily routine. Develop some nondigital hobbies e.g. painting, swimming, gardening, cooking, outdoor sports etc. Avoid eating junk foods, e.g. pizza, burger, french fry, pastries, carbonated soft drinks etc. Add green leafy vegetables, fresh fruits to everyday meals. Eat a healthy diet with all kinds of nutritional

supplements to avoid obesity.

- Prevent computer vision syndrome by keeping a distance of about 45cm from the monitor. Adjust brightness and contrast properly. Blink consciously while working on the computer. Follow 20/20/20 rule: take 20seconds break in every 20minutes interval, and see objects 20 feet away, e.g. sky, windows. Adjust computer software, such as ensuring that the font, font size and screen display settings meet the visual needs of the user
- Avoid sleep disorder by establishing a regular sleep schedule both sleep time and wake time. Create a comfortable cool dark sleep environment. Establish relaxing habits at bedtime such as meditation. Take a warm bath before bed. Stop television or computer use one hour before you go to bed as the light from inhibit sleep onset.
- Take protection against electromagnetic radiation hazards. Keep some distance from computer accessories. Use ear phones or other measures of hand free, to keep distance from the smart phones
- Practice stress management technique e.g. meditation, relaxation etc. Identify and get treatment (counselling) for the underlying issues contributing to the addiction e.g. anxiety, depression etc. Increase time spend on sports, hobbies and other non-Internet activities
- Know how to delete something that posted in the past and deactivate a profile, remove comments from others on own profile or account, delete name from photos tagged to identify.
- Turn off notifications. Set a schedule in which you allow yourself to manually check email and social media once every two hours or so.
- Focus on studies.
- Talk to the friends about the problems you've been having with your internet usage, and ask them to spend more time with you. Instead of chatting with them online, invite them over to your house for dinner, or go meet up with them for dinner. It will improve relationships with the people.
- ⊙ Keep computer somewhere in house where people are likely to walk by, so they can tell to get off it. Turn the computer off and store it out of sight when it's not in use.
- ⊙ *Education for the Teens' Parents*
- Set clear time management goals with the teen
- Negotiate a computer free day once each week
- Help teens to develop non digital hobbies
- Review ratings of games. No M-rated games for teens. It may contain intense violence, blood, sexual content, strong language etc.
- If internet gaming is interfering with teen's school or social life, parents should seek professional help.
- If a teen has a large amount of pornography, his or her parent may need to seek professional help.
- Be mindful of the source of pornography. If a teen has received pornography from another person, he or she may be at risk for abuse.
- Talk with teens about the risks of sexting. Remind them that there is no guarantee that a picture or post shared with someone else will remain private.
- Understand the range of technology that adolescents are exposed to inside and outside of the home.
- Learn what appropriate technology use is by age and stage of child development.
- Co-view, co-play, and actively discuss digital media.
- Start a conversation about media and technology use at home and explain why family disapproves of certain online behaviors.
- Set clear technology use rules that are specific to your child. Create limits on the amount of use (i.e., limit technology use by time of day or weekends) and content (i.e., limit access to specific sites).
- Encourage adolescents and young adults to think critically about digital media and develop their own self-monitoring skills.
- Create open, non-judgmental, lines of communication. Children should feel comfortable coming to parents with problems they experience offline and online.
- Remind children that what they do online affects their reputation and their future.
- Talk about the need to protect privacy online.
- Modeling- Use technology to find useful information and to engage in fun/productive sharing with family and friends.
- Monitoring, - Parents should know what their children are doing online. Here are some tips on how to monitor child's online activity: consider placing filtering and monitoring software on all

forms of technology, lights out, technology off. Consider gathering phones in a central place at night.

- Mentoring - Build interests that are not digital. Create offline environment for children that includes plenty of exercise, parent/child activities, family time/meditation, etc. Help children structure their daily routines (i.e., school, family meals, sports, clubs, religious practices, etc.)
- Parents should demonstrate appropriate use of technology: no technology while driving, at the dinner table while interacting with children, family members, or in social settings

Conclusion

One can use a matchstick to light a lamp or light a fire for cooking. It can also be used to light a fire that burns some one's house. The matchstick by itself is just a harmless object. In the hands of a mother lighting the lamp or the cooking fire, it becomes beneficial. The same matchstick in the hands of a small careless child could prove to be fatal. Thus every individual should learn to use internet smartly.

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