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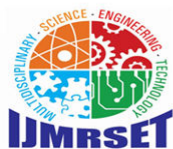
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The Influence of Internet Addiction on Mental Health: Examining Depression, Anxiety, And Stress Levels Among University Students in Kerala

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ABSTRACT: Among the students attending universities in Kerala, the major objective of this study is to investigate the consequences of internet addiction on stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders. In recent years, there has been a rise in the number of people, particularly young people, who are concerned about the potential effects of the internet on their mental health. The purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between using the internet excessively and experiencing challenges with mental health by conducting a survey with a sample that is typical of university students attending a variety of institutions in Kerala. By using well-established psychological metrics, the purpose of this study is to investigate the influence that addiction to the internet has on feelings of despair, anxiety, and stress. As one's level of internet addiction increases, it is possible that feelings of anxiety, depression, and tension may grow more intense. It is expected that the results will provide an understanding of the challenges that college students face in terms of their mental health as a result of their extensive usage of the internet and will also provide potential solutions to these mental health problems. This research will contribute to the growing body of knowledge about the effects of internet addiction on mental health by concentrating specifically on college students in the state of Kerala.

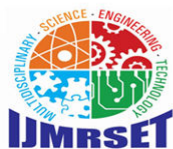
KEYWORDS: Internet addiction, Mental health, Depression, Anxiety, Stress, University students, Kerala

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of individuals using the internet, especially among younger people, which has led to a significant increase in the amount of concern over the potential adverse effects of internet usage on mental health. Recently, there has been a substantial increase in the amount of attention paid to the issue of internet addiction, which may be characterized as an excessive fascination with using the internet to harmful levels. University students are a significant population in this digital age that is particularly vulnerable to the adverse psychological effects that are associated with internet addiction. These students may be subjected to a great deal of stress as a result of the academic requirements, social expectations, and the challenges of transitioning to college life. As a consequence, they are more prone to experience the psychological impacts of excessive internet use. In a state like Kerala, where internet availability and use have substantially expanded, it is of the utmost importance to have a comprehensive understanding of the consequences that internet addiction has on mental health.

Relationship between addiction to the internet and mental health problems

The amount of research suggesting that addiction to the internet may make the mental health issues that are already prevalent among college students, such as anxiety, stress, and depression, much more severe is growing. Typical signs and symptoms of depression include a lack of interest in things that were formerly enjoyable, an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness, and an inability to elevate one's spirits during times of sadness. In contrast to anxiety, which is marked by pathological overthinking and dread, stress is the physiological reaction that occurs in response to dangerous situations or challenges. The relationship between addiction to the internet and these mental health problems is complex due to the fact that the internet may serve as both a safe haven offering consolation and a platform from which harmful sentiments might emerge.



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Excessive usage of the internet detrimental impacts such as social isolation, decline in academic performance

College students have the potential to acquire an addiction to the internet via a variety of activities, including excessive use of social media platforms, game playing, and browsing the web. Despite the fact that the internet has many beneficial elements, such as making it easier to obtain information and fostering social ties, excessive usage of the internet may have detrimental impacts such as social isolation, decline in academic performance, and poor mental health. According to study, excessive time spent in front of electronic screens may hinder individuals from obtaining sufficient amounts of sleep, lead to lifestyles that are less physically active, and prevent them from learning appropriate methods to cope with stress. Several studies have shown that those who are addicted to the internet have greater levels of depression, anxiety, and stress than those who do not. Comparisons made on social media, for example, might exacerbate symptoms of depression by contributing to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Additionally, individuals may have an increase in their levels of worry, and their ability to focus on important matters, such as their schoolwork or their personal relationships, may be impaired as a result of the unending supply of information that is accessible online.

The mental health of college students is deserving of a great deal of attention since they are going through a time of personal and professional transition while also handling the pressures of education, relationships, and future ambitions. If a student refuses to get treatment for their mental health, it may have a negative impact on their academic achievement, their social ties, and their overall well-being. Consequently, the goal of this research is to evaluate the association between internet addiction and mental health disorders such as stress, anxiety, and depression among college students in Kerala. The findings of this study will provide light on the linkages between internet addiction and its impacts on mental health, particularly as they relate to educational institutions in Kerala. This research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge currently available on the subject.

OBJECTIVE

1. To Assess the Impact of Internet Addiction on Mental Health: Analysing Stress, Anxiety, and Depression among Keralan University Students
2. To relationship between Internet addiction and Keralan college students' mental health.

Research Questions:

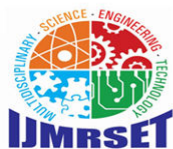
1. What is the level of internet addiction among university students in Kerala?
2. How does internet addiction correlate with depression, anxiety, and stress among university students?
3. Are there any gender differences in the impact of internet addiction on mental health?

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the links between online addiction and mental health-related characteristics among college students and to identify those aspects that were connected with internet addiction. The descriptive correlational examination was carried out by the researchers via the use of quantitative processes. Those that took part were undergraduate students from the Calicut District, which is located in the state of Kerala in India. With a cut-off score of 53 on the Implicit Association Test (IAT), the researcher eliminated the students who were hooked. We recruited the assistance of students whose scores were 53 or above for the purpose of doing the final analysis. They utilised a sample size of eighty people.

The Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) and the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) were both administered during the second phase of the study, which also involved the collection of sociodemographic information. When doing the analysis of the data, frequency and percentiles were employed, and the instruments that were utilised were taken into consideration. The connection was discovered as a result of an investigation into the connection between addiction to the internet and mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. The student statistical application, which was known as SPSS 20, was used for the aim of doing statistical analysis.

The approach of multistage stratified random sampling was used by the researcher in order to get the necessary information. Self-administered questionnaires consisting of 42 questions were solicited from the participants and asked to be filled out. Requests for informed permission from participants were made prior to the collection of any data data. The sociodemographic information for the research was collected with the use of a protoforma that was specifically



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designed to be semi-structured. The sociodemographic data collection included a variety of categories, including age, gender, religion, family status, time spent on the internet, and so on.

A reliable and accepted method for determining whether or not someone is addicted to the internet is to use the Internet Addiction Test (IAT). The twenty items are used to determine the severity of Internet addiction, which may be broken down into three stages: mild, moderate, and severe. Relatively little study has been done on the issue of determining whether or not these cut-off scores are appropriate. To determine whether or not an individual is addicted to the internet, the Japanese form recommended a cutoff score of 53.

It was in the year 1988 that Aaron T. Beck and his colleagues came up with the Beck Anxiety assessment, often known as the BAI. The assessment is a self-reporting tool that evaluates the level of anxiety experienced by people. It consists of 21 questions with multiple-choice responses and is administered to adults. Each of the 21 questions is added together to obtain the overall score, with a score of 0–21 suggesting that there is no anxiety, a score of 22–35 showing that there is moderate anxiety, and a score of 36 or more indicating that there may be alarming levels of anxiety.

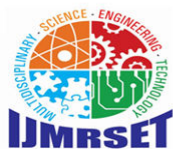
A Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) was used in order to assess the level of depression that was present in the research group. It was in 1961 that Beck and his colleagues developed this measure. The scale consists of just twenty-one items that are of the Likert kind. In each of the questions, there are four different responses that might be given, and the severity levels range from 0 (none) to 3. This is the potential total amount, which ranges from zero to sixty-three points. Among the kids who have scores of 17 or above, those who are suspected of having depression are those students.

III. RESULTS

Table No 1: The Level of Internet Addiction

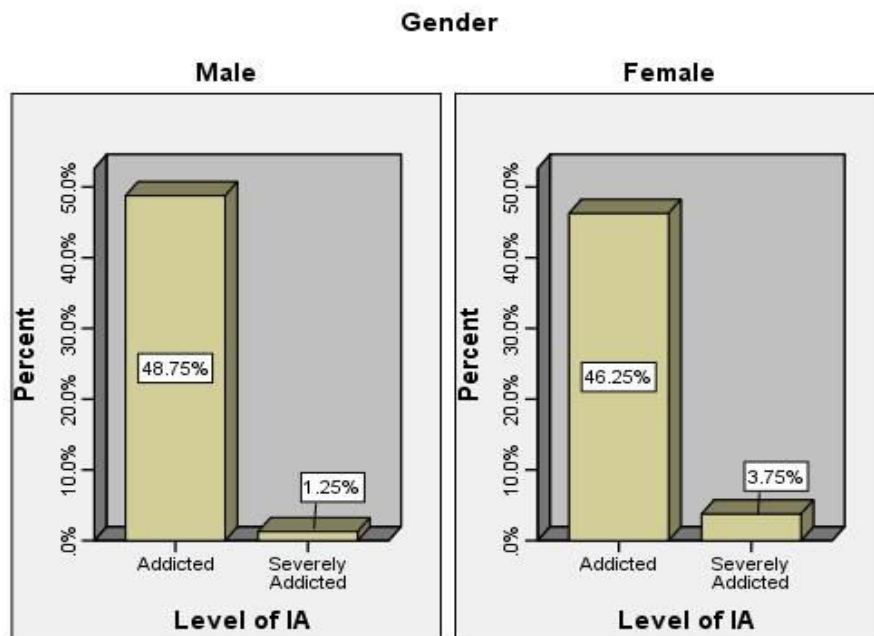
Scoring Pattern	Frequency	Percentage
20 – 52 Normal	216	72.97
53 – 79 Addicted	75	25.34
80 - 100 Severely Addicted	5	1.69
Total	296	100

As can be seen in the table that is located above, there were a total of 296 students that participated in this IAT research. According to the findings of the research, out of a total of 296 students, 80 were found to have an addiction to using the internet. There were seventy-five kids who were moderately hooked, and five students who were very addicted out of a total of eighty students. In accordance with the explanation, a significant proportion of children engage in excessive usage of the internet. It is estimated that over thirty percent of students are addicted to the internet, or utilise it in an unhealthy or dangerous manner.



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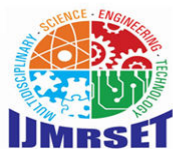
Graph No 1: Cross tabulation between gender and addiction

This graphic demonstrates that there are gender disparities in the degree of addiction. In addition to the fact that 46.25 percent of female students are addicted to the internet, 48.75 percent of male students are also addicted to the internet. On the other hand, when it comes to cases of significant addiction, 3.75 percent of female students and 1.25 percent of male students are reliant on the internet. When we examine the phenomenon of internet addiction according to gender, we find that women are more likely to suffer from the disorder than males. Although the severity of a man's addiction is lower than that of a woman's, neither gender is fully free of the condition.

Table No 2: Level of Anxiety

Scoring Pattern	Levels of Anxiety	Frequency	Percentage
0 – 21	Low	51	63.75
22 – 35	Moderate	26	32.5
36 &	Severe	3	3.75
Total		80	100%

As can be seen in the table that is located above, this anxiety test was given to eighty Indian American students who were selected at random. In the study, 63.75 percent of the children had a low level of anxiety, 32.5 percent had a moderate level of anxiety, and 3.75 percent had a severe level of anxiety. According to the findings, 36.26 percent of students who are addicted to the internet experience anxiety that ranges from moderate to severe.



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Table No 3: Level of Depression

Scoring Pattern	Levels of Depression	Frequency	Percentage
1-10	Normal	49	61.25
11 – 16	Mild mood disturbances	26	28.75
17-20	Borderline Clinical Depression	3	3.75
21-30	Moderate Depression	5	6.25
31-40	Severe Depression	Nil	Nil
Over40	Extreme Depression	Nil	Nil
Total		80	100%

As can be seen in the table that is located above, a total of eighty students from the IA course were given a depression test. 61.25% of the students who were questioned were assessed to be at a "normal level" of depression; 28.75% of the students had mild mood disturbance; 3.75 percent of the students were borderline clinically depressed; 6.25 percent of the students had moderate depression; and there were no students who were diagnosed with severe or profound depression. The percentage of students who report having mild, borderline clinical, or major depression is 38.5% among those who spend a significant amount of time online.

Table No 3: Correlation of Depression and Anxiety

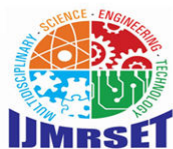
		Depression	Anxiety
Depression	Pearson Correlation	1	.884
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	80	80
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.884	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	80	80

The level of Significance Selected as .05. r -value = .884 p -value is .000

With a correlation coefficient that is much higher than zero ($r = 0.884$), the table that came before this one makes it abundantly clear that there is a very significant link between the two variables. The fact that the p -value is lower than 0.05 makes it very evident that there is a substantial connection between anxiety and depression.

IV. DISCUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

According to the findings of the survey, 27.03 percent of students were hooked to the internet, with 2.54 percent having a moderate addiction and 1.569 percent suffering a severe addiction. Research conducted by a variety of researchers has shown prevalence rates that are either similar or somewhat lower. It may be due to differences in the accessibility of the internet, the different diagnostic tools that are used to detect internet addiction, or the distinct sociocultural and educational backgrounds of the study population.



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Additionally, the researcher looked at the personal profiles of the respondents as well as the socio-demographic information. Her research revealed that among the female students, 3.5% are badly hooked to the internet, while among the male students, 1.5% are the same. There were 88.75% of respondents who were from nuclear families, 11.25% who came from mixed families, and 57.5% who came from urban regions, in contrast to 42.5% who came from rural areas. There is also a considerable effect in the utilisation of personal telephones (60%) as well as desktop computers, laptops, and iPads. When students bring their own mobile devices to school, they often find themselves riveted to the screen, participating in a variety of kinds of electronic communication, playing games, and browsing the internet respectively. The majority of students use the internet for three to five hours (45%) and for more than six hours (25%) on a daily basis, which is consistent with the findings of previous studies that indicate that internet addiction develops at a frequency of twenty hours or more per week. According to the same report, seventy percent of students use the internet for more than three hours every day, which shows that they may be severely addicted to the internet. Additionally, according to the same study, an individual will develop an addiction to the internet if they use it for a minimum of three hours every day.

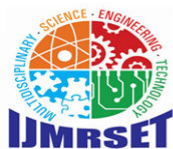
According to the findings of this poll, the vast majority of students (82.50%) conduct their internet access using their mobile phones. The findings of the study indicate that students devote a greater proportion of their time to web surfing (18.75%) and social networking sites (58.75%) than they do to other sorts of activities that take place online, such as engaging in sexual behaviours or playing video games. The majority of kids start using the internet between the ages of 12 (31.25%) and 13 (23.75%) when they sign up for an account. This result is supported by the findings of a comparable study that was conducted by Shek et al. (2012). The early stages of adolescence are a time of development. The first stage of adolescence is referred to as early adolescence, and it runs from the ages of 10 to fourteen. Due to the fact that it believes it is capable of dealing with all that life throws at it, it can start smoking, surfing the internet excessively, drinking too much, and other similar behaviours.

As a direct consequence of their usage of the internet, the majority of students are going to bed sometime after midnight, as shown by the results of the survey. According to previous study, individuals who are addicted to the internet and engage in other problematic internet use behaviours may have a major influence on their sleep-wake rhythm, which may lead to insomnia and other sleep deficiencies. The results of this poll indicate that the majority of students use their mobile devices to access the internet either shortly after brushing their teeth (36.3% of students) or immediately after waking up (55 percent of students use the internet). According to Gorges (2012), who discovered that ninety percent of young Indians check their phones first thing in the morning, the findings of this research are consistent with those previously discovered.

A thorough approach is required in order to reduce the amount of time that adolescents spend on the internet. During the COVID-19 period, students were allowed to utilise mobile devices that were equipped with internet access for the sake of their academic work. Even after the enrolment period for offline classes had begun, students were free to use the device for whatever purpose they choose. In order to bring the psychological impacts of internet addiction to the notice of a wide range of individuals, including students, parents, educators, and legislators, further attention is required.

V. CONCLUSION

According to the findings of this study, internet addiction is substantially connected with a number of mental health conditions, including anxiety, stress, and depression, among students attending universities in Kerala. There is a link between higher levels of internet addiction and increased feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression. This shows that excessive internet use may have a negative impact on psychological well-being. Evidence demonstrates that excessive internet usage may have a psychologically damaging effect. The results have brought to light the need of addressing the mental health problems that are created by internet addiction among college students by bringing attention to the problem and taking direct action. In addition, the study highlights the need of specific mental health therapies as a means of mitigating the adverse effects that are associated with excessive internet use. By offering counselling services and awareness efforts, educational institutions like colleges and universities have the potential to have a substantial influence on the lives of students who are struggling with mental health concerns such as stress, anxiety, and depression. In addition, schools should encourage and provide children with skills to help them establish a good balance between their academic, social, and online life. This may be accomplished by fostering healthy coping strategies. The results of this research give crucial information on the impacts of internet addiction on mental health.



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Additionally, these findings provide the framework for therapies and studies that attempt to enhance the mental health of persons in Kerala who are of college age.

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