

Examining Gender and Ethnic Differences in Internet Addiction

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ABSTRACT

Background: The widespread use of the Internet has brought numerous benefits, but it has also raised concerns about its potential negative impact on mental health. Worldwide Internet Addiction is a newly emerging mental health and social issue among the youths causing neurological complications, psychological disturbances and social problems. The situation is alarming for college going students as well. **Objective:** The index study was carried out to examine the impact of gender and ethnicity of college students on internet addiction. **Method:** The study consisted of 400 (200 male and female each) college going students of Ranchi University. The group was further divided into tribal and non-tribal groups. Personal Data Questionnaire and Internet Addiction Test were administered on all the participants and the groups were compared in respect to level of Internet Addiction. **Result:** Almost two-third of the students were found to have internet addiction.

Keywords: Internet Addiction, Gender Differences, Ethnicity, Behavioral Addiction

In today's hyper connected world, the internet has become an indispensable part of everyone's daily life contributing to the rise of internet addiction. While internet provides immense benefits like communication, education, entertainment, its 24/7 accessibility, instant gratification and endless content make it highly engaging. Features like auto play videos, infinite scrolling, social media notification and online gaming rewards are deliberately designed to capture users' attention and encourage prolonged use.

Internet Addiction is increasingly recognized as a significant concern among college students. It is characterized by excessive and compulsive use of the Internet, often leading to negative consequences in various aspects of an individual's life. Internet addiction can have wide ranging psychological, social and physical consequences, particularly among adolescents and young adults (Begum, 2024; Kumar, Goel & Mehra, 2024).

The magnitude of Internet Addiction in India ranges from 19% to 58% (Joseph et al., 2022; Sharma, Ghosh and Mahara, 2024). Studying internet addiction among college students becomes crucial because this group is particularly vulnerable due to their developmental stage, academic pressure and increased autonomy. Moreover, in an era where technology is deeply integrated into education, distinguishing between productive use and addictive

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behavior is essential for promoting balanced and healthy digital habits among college students.

Objectives

The index study was carried out with the following objectives:

- To examine the impact of gender of college students on internet addiction.
- To examine the impact of ethnicity of college students on internet addiction.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample of the study consisted of 400 college going students of Ranchi University. There are 200 male and 200 female students each further divided into tribal and non-tribal subgroups of 100 each. Purposive sampling technique is used for the selection process. The sample design is based on 2x2 factorial design.

- Gender: 2 (Male/Female)
- Ethnicity: 2 (Tribal/ Non-Tribal)

Tools

The following tools were used for data collection:

- **Personal Data Questionnaire (PDQ)** - Personal Data Questionnaire (PDQ) was prepared by the Research Scholar to know the socio-demographic details like name, age, sex, ethnicity, college etc. from the respondents.
- **Internet Addiction Test (IAT)**- Internet Addiction Test (IAT) was developed by Dr. Kimberly Young (1998). It is a 20-item scale that measures characteristics and behaviors associated with compulsive use of the Internet that include compulsivity, escapism and dependency.

Scoring -Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 5 (0= Not applicable; 1= Rarely; 2= Occasionally; 3= Frequently; 4= Often; 5= Always). The maximum score is 100. Total scores that range from 0 to 30 points are considered to reflect a normal level of Internet usage; scores of 31 to 49 indicate the presence of a mild level of Internet Addiction; 50 to 79 reflect the presence of a moderate level; and scores of 80 to 100 indicate a severe dependence upon the Internet.

Time duration -The IAT requires between 5 to 10 minutes to complete when it is self-administered. Oral administration generally takes 10 minutes.

Reliability and Validity - IAT is the first global psychometric measure and hence has been extensively and frequently used across many studies globally, is self-completed, has been validated on adult and adolescent populations, and has good internal consistency reliability as well as concurrent validity.

Statistical Analyses

Chi Square test is applied to find out:

- The significant difference between male and female in terms of Internet Addiction
- The significant difference between tribal and non-tribal in terms of Internet Addiction

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Following are the main results of the study:

- **Internet Addiction between Male and Female**

Table 1 Impact of Gender on Internet Addiction

Gender	Category			Total	Chi Square Value
	Normal	Mild	Moderate		
Male	70 (35%)	50 (25%)	80 (40%)	200	3.9 N.S.
Female	40 (20%)	110 (55%)	50 (25%)	200	
Total	110	160	130	400	

Here, $df=2$.

- **Internet Addiction between Tribal and Non- Tribal**

Table 2 Impact of Ethnicity on Internet Addiction

Ethnicity	Category			Total	Chi Square Value
	Normal	Mild	Moderate		
Tribal	70 (35%)	100 (50%)	30 (15%)	200	5.58 N.S.
Non-Tribal	40 (20%)	60 (30%)	100 (50%)	200	
Total	110	160	130	400	

Here, $df=2$

DISCUSSION

As per Table 1, no significant difference has been found in respect to the level of addiction and gender. Generally, Internet Addiction has been reported more among males than females (Sharma et al.,2014; Subhaprada S. and Kalyani P.,2017). However, in the index study, no such significance has been found. This can be explained on the basis of the fact that nowadays, gender stereotype behavior is gradually getting diluted. Now, females are not necessarily subjected to routine domestic activities as they were earlier prevalent in the society. The girls also have sufficient leisure time and that is why they are also exposed to technology-ridden activities and internet facilities are equally utilized by them as has been in practice by boys. This also indicates attitudinal change in the society where females are given due freedom and autonomy resulting in similar types of behavioral patterns which were earlier indicated only to males.

The present study did not find any significant difference among tribal and non-tribal students in respect to their level of Internet Addiction as depicted in Table 2. Majority of students have been from urban backgrounds or have been staying in urban areas for substantial periods of time. So, the exposure to the technology has been similar to both the groups. The dependence on internet based services like online classes, availability of e-books/ journals have been a necessity for one and everyone especially from the time when COVID pandemic came into being a couple of years back. We cannot deny the fact that such mandatory exposure to students has definitely increased screen timing of students to the extent of making some of them internet dependents. This explains the possible reasons why the tribal and non- tribal students did not differ in terms of their level of internet addiction.

Implications of the Study

Despite a high percentage of college students being found to have 'mild' to 'moderate' level of Internet Addiction but luckily, nobody was found to have 'severe' level of addiction. Hence, it can be inferred that the affected students can be counselled and helped to come

back to the 'normal' range of scores. Absence of 'severe' level of addiction suggests that none of the students required any clinical help as such and even not qualifying to be dysfunctional in respect to various psychosocial and academic activities. But the administration must ensure that students in general must be sensitized and made aware that technology is a good servant but a bad master.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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