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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# IMPACT OF INTERNET USAGE ON THE PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN CHENNAI

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to understand the influence of internet usage and dependency on the psychosocial well-being of college students. The samples comprised of 1200 college students belonging to the age group of 17-21 years. Of the 1200, 600 belonged to government colleges and 600 were from private colleges. To assess the student's internet usage, social interaction, mental well-being and loneliness questionnaires were used namely, 'The Young People's Internet Usage' Questionnaire by Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre, UK, Mental, physical and spiritual Well-Being Scale (MPS Scale) by Vella-Brodrick and Allen (1995) and UCLA Loneliness Scale developed by Russell (1996). Descriptive and inferential statistics were computed using SPSS to analyse the data collected. The findings of the present study report better psychological well-being among the female participants. In addition, private college students were found to have increased social interaction than the government college students. Whereas, the male students belonging to private colleges were found to be lonelier. Besides, a significant relationship was found between internet usage and psychological well-being and social interaction. Furthermore, it was found that the type of college, gender, education of mother, well-being and social interaction contributed negatively to the internet usage of the college students. Whereas, loneliness, internet dependency, education of father and family's monthly income contributed positively to the internet usage thereby indicating that higher the internet usage, higher the internet dependency and loneliness and lower the psychological well-being and social interaction among the college students.

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## INTRODUCTION

Internet is one of the most significant technological developments which allegedly grants access to the world to everyone regardless of their differences (Jagboro, 2003). The firm reason behind the recognition of internet and its usage among psychologists might be due to the increasing influence of internet among the lives of people (Hamburger and Ben-Artzi, 2003). Though the internet has positive aspects including informative, convenient, resourceful and fun, these benefits turn out to be useless for the excessive internet users. It has been found that increased internet usage created alienation among the social circle as the internet has become a predominant social factor among the lives of internet users (Weiser, 2001). A study by Nalwaa and Anand (2003) revealed the relationship between loneliness, depression increased internet usage. It is also claimed that excessive internet usage had a negative influence on the overall individual development (Bayraktar, 2001; Morgan and Cotton, 2003). Sadly, the leading users of internet are found to be children and young

people. Therefore there is an inevitable need to study this area in order to highlight, create awareness on our negative way of life as well as overcome this addictive pattern of living. Moreover very little has been done on the effect of internet usage on adolescents in India. There remains a dearth of research on what exactly internet usage does to the psychosocial wellbeing of the adolescent/college students. Therefore, it is important to understand the influence of internet usage and dependency on their psychosocial well-being.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Participants

For the present investigation, 1200 college students belonging to the age group of 17-21 years in Chennai, India. Of the 1200 participants, 600 belonged to government colleges and 600 from private colleges. Participants were chosen in such a way that each has an equal and independent chance of being selected.

### Measures

First part of the questionnaire included questions relating to name, gender, age, class and college studying, family's

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monthly income, educational qualification and occupational status of parents.

### 1. Internet Usage & Social Interaction

The Young People's Internet Usage Questionnaire was used to identify high internet users and indicate the relationship of the college students with their family and friends. This questionnaire is adapted from Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Centre, UK.

### 2. Mental, physical and spiritual Well-Being Scale (MPS Scale)

Participant well-being was measured using the MPS Scale (Vella-Brodrick & Allen, 1995). This 30-item scale was constructed to serve as an easy-to-use measure of holistic health and well-being. These 30 questions are so framed that the higher the score on the scale better the subject's wellbeing.

### 3. Loneliness

The UCLA Loneliness Scale was developed by Russell (1996). This tool measures the level of loneliness of the subject. The scale comprises of 20 statements, which was to be rated on a 4 point scale (i.e.) often, sometimes, seldom, not at all. It was found that all high scoring subjects were lonelier than low scoring subjects.

### Data Analysis

The data obtained through the questionnaire were coded, classified and tabulated with respective scores. After which, data were processed and analysed with descriptive and inferential analysis using SPSS (Statistical package for Social Sciences) Version 16.

Table 1 shows that 66.2% of the males of the private college use the internet when compared to 33.8% of the males of government colleges. Also 75.3% of the females of the private college use the internet as compared to 24.7% of the females from government college females. In the high internet usage category, it is seen that 98.5% of males and 53.5% of the females of private colleges use the internet when compared to 1.5% of males and 46.5% of females of the government colleges. With respect to number of siblings, it is noted that 51.5% of the males and 62.1% of the females who had a sister were high internet users and 58.8% of the males and 69.7% of the females who had a brother were high internet users. Also, 39.9% of the males and 35.8% of the females who were born first were moderate internet users and 34.3% of the males and 32.3% of the females were high internet users. It can be observed that 37.9% of the males and 57.1% of the females of family income above Rs.30,000 were high internet users as compared to the other income groups. Also it is noted that 43.2% of the males and 58.0% of the females who had a family monthly income of less than Rs.10,000 were low internet users as compared to High internet users.

It can be noted from Table 2 that the students whose fathers are educated up to the X std are low internet users (16.2% males and 22.6% females) when compared to the students whose father are educated till the post graduate level. It can be also inferred that higher the educational status of the father, the higher the internet usage by the college students. Similarly the mothers whose educational status was up to Std XII, the students use the internet to a lesser percentage when compared to the higher the qualification of the mothers. The mothers who are post graduates it can be observed that 18.1% of the male and 15.7% of the female college students were high internet users whereas the mothers who had a higher qualification 30.4% of the males and 38.9% of the females were high internet users. It is also noted from Table 2 that the students

**Table 1. General details of the selected college students**

Demographic Details	Internet Usage (N=1200)					
	Low (N= 260)		Moderate (N= 538)		High (N= 402)	
	Male (N= 74)	Female (N=186)	Male (N= 228)	Female (N=310)	Male (N=204)	Female (N=198)
Type of college						
Government	33.8	24.7	28.1	34.8	1.5	46.5
Private	66.2	75.3	71.9	65.2	98.5	53.5
Number of siblings						
Brothers						
Nil	43.2	32.3	39.0	28.7	41.2	30.3
1 Brother	56.8	67.7	61.0	71.3	58.8	69.7
Sisters						
Nil	47.3	35.5	43.0	38.4	48.5	37.9
1 Sister	51.40	64.5	57.0	61.6	51.5	62.1
2 Sisters	1.4	-	-	-	-	-
Birth Order						
First	36.5	38.2	39.9	35.8	34.3	32.3
Second	33.8	26.3	36.4	29.4	34.3	35.9
Last	18.9	31.7	16.7	29.7	23.5	28.8
Only child	10.8	3.8	7.0	5.2	7.8	3.0
Family's Monthly Income						
Less than 10000	43.2	58.0	12.7	12.6	13.1	13.1
Rs.10,000-Rs.20,000	32.4	22.6	30.7	18.4	24.0	14.6
Rs.20,000- Rs.30,000	8.1	8.6	7.0	27.4	25.0	15.2
Rs.30,000 and above	16.2	10.8	49.6	41.6	37.9	57.1

Note. The students who used the internet everyday were categorized as "High Internet Users", the students who used the internet more than once a week and once a week were categorized under "Moderate Internet Users" and the students who used the internet once a month and once a year were categorized as "Low Internet Users".

## RESULTS

The percentage distribution of the selected demographic factors with respect to the use of internet are presented in Table 1 & 2.

whose fathers who were software engineers used the internet more as compared to the other professions. Of the 60.6% males and 70.3% females, were high internet users and 71.9% males and 69% females were moderate internet users.

**Table 2. Educational and occupational status of parents**

Educational and occupational status of parents	Internet Usage (N=1200)							
	Low (N= 260)		Moderate (N= 538)			High (N= 402)		
	Male (N= 74)	Female (N=186)	Male (N= 228)	Female (N= 310)	Male (N=204)	Female (N= 198)		
Education of Father								
X	16.2	22.6	23.7	21.6	13.7	21.7		
XII	2.7	3.8	6.6	1.9	21.1	10.1		
Graduation	17.6	13.4	18.0	16.1	35.3	22.2		
Post-Graduation	21.6	13.4	19.3	20.3	14.7	8.6		
Others	41.9	46.8	32.5	40.0	15.2	37.4		
Education of Mother								
X	24.3	33.3	28.5	33.9	16.2	27.8		
XII	2.7	1.6	6.6	6.0	13.7	3.0		
Graduation	6.8	6.5	12.3	5.8	21.6	14.6		
Post-Graduation	18.9	10.8	15.8	17.7	18.1	15.7		
Others	47.3	47.8	36.8	41.9	30.4	38.9		
Occupational Status of Father								
Employed / Unemployed	1.3	0.0	0.0	3.1	1.0	0.5		
Self- Employed(Business)	0.0	4.3	9.0	3.2	12.2	8.0		
Clerks	8.8	10.2	5.0	10.4	11.8	12.1		
Teachers/Lecturers	1.4	1.6	4.0	1.3	5.4	2.0		
Professionals(Dr/Engineers)	12.8	10.2	10.1	13.1	9.0	7.1		
Computer Software	75.7	73.7	71.9	69.0	60.6	70.3		
Occupational Status of Mother								
Employed / Unemployed	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.5		
Self- Employed (Business)	2.7	3.2	3.5	3.0	2.9	1.5		
Clerks	0.0	1.1	4.8	1.3	5.4	3.5		
Teachers/Lecturers	6.8	4.8	5.7	7.4	2.9	2.0		
Professionals (Dr/Engineers)	12.2	9.1	13.2	11.0	12.7	10.1		
Computer Software	78.4	81.7	72.8	80.0	75.0	82.3		
Time Father gets back from work								
After 5 p.m.	39.2	26.9	36.8	28.4	38.2	35.4		
After 8 p.m.	56.8	69.9	54.8	60.0	58.3	58.6		
Early Morning	4.1	3.2	7.9	11.6	2.5	6.1		
Time Mother gets back from work								
After 5 p.m.	90.6	89.2	87.3	86.1	86.8	91.4		
After 8 p.m.	5.4	10.2	11.8	11.0	13.2	8.6		
Early Morning	4.1	0.5	0.9	2.9	0.0	0.0		

The students whose mothers were software engineers also had a good percentage of internet users as observed in three fourths of the males and 82.3% of the females were high internet users and 72.8% of the males and 80% of females were moderate internet users. A view of the Table 2 shows the internet usage among college students with regard to the fathers and mothers time to get back home from work. It is noted from the findings that a higher percentage of the fathers returned from work after 8 pm. Whereas a higher percentage of mothers returned from work after 5 pm. It is noted from the table that a major percentage of the students used the internet in the presence of the parents. Table 3 compares the psychological well-being, loneliness and social interaction based on the gender of the college students.

**Table 3. Difference between male and female college students on psychological well-being, loneliness and social interaction**

Variables	Male (n=506)		Female (n=694)		t value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Psychological Well-being	82.03	12.98	87.32	12.70	7.054**
Loneliness	53.66	7.25	51.75	7.29	4.511**
Social Interaction	32.11	8.65	33.04	8.30	1.89

Note. \*\*p<.01

Table 3 shows significant difference in the psychological well-being ( $t = 7.054$ ,  $p < 0.1$ ) and loneliness ( $t = 4.511$ ,  $p < .01$ ) based on the gender of the college students but no significant difference was found between the male and female college students on their social interaction. It is inferred from the findings that the female college students ( $m = 87.32$ ,  $SD = 12.70$ ) have better psychological well-being than the male

college students ( $m = 82.03$ ,  $SD = 12.98$ ). Whereas, male college students ( $m = 53.66$ ,  $SD = 7.25$ ) were found to be more lonely than female college students ( $m = 51.75$ ,  $SD = 7.29$ ). The comparison of psychological well-being, loneliness and social interaction between the government and private college students is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Difference between government and private college students on psychological well-being, loneliness and social interaction**

Variables	Government College Students (n=338)		Private College Students (n=862)		t value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Psychological Well-being	84.87	13.20	85.17	13.04	0.36
Loneliness	51.25	7.58	53.07	7.17	3.89**
Social Interaction	31.02	10.19	33.28	7.58	4.19**

Note. \*\*p<.01

Results of table 4 shows that there is a significant difference in the social interaction ( $t = 4.19$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and loneliness ( $t = 3.89$ ,  $p < .01$ ) among the government and private college students. It is inferred from the findings that the private college students ( $m = 33.28$ ,  $SD = 7.58$ ) had moresocial interaction than the government college students ( $m = 31.02$ ,  $SD = 10.19$ ). Similarly, private college students ( $m = 53.07$ ,  $SD = 7.17$ ) were found to be more lonely than government college students ( $m = 51.25$ ,  $SD = 7.58$ ). But no difference was found among the college students in terms of psychological well-being. The comparison of psychological well-being, loneliness and social interaction based on the levels of internet usage among college students is shown in Table 5 (a) and 3 (b).

**Table 5(a). Comparison of psychological well-being, loneliness and social interaction based on the levels of internet use**

Variable	Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Well Being	Between Groups	501.66	2	250.83	1.467
	Within Groups	204674.5	1197	170.99	
	Total	205176.2	1199		
Social Interaction	Between Groups	233.164	2	116.58	1.63
	Within Groups	85520.73	1197	71.45	
	Total	85753.89	1199		
Loneliness	Between Groups	1540.554	2	770.28	14.66**
	Within Groups	62883.82	1197	52.54	
	Total	64424.37	1199		

Note. \*\*p<.01

**Table 5 (b). Loneliness and Internet Usage (Duncan's Multiple Range Test)**

Internet Usage	N	Subset	
		1	2
High	402	51.01	
Low	260		52.86
Moderate	538		53.57

It is evident from table 5 (a) that no significant difference exist in the psychological well-being and social interaction of college students based on the level of internet use but significant difference was found in loneliness (F [2,1197]=14.66) of the college students based on their internet usage. In order to find the source of difference, the Duncan's Multiple Range Test was conducted with results displayed in Table 5 (b). Results suggests that students who are low and moderate internet users are lonelier as compared to the high internet users. The relationship between internet usage and the psychosocial factors among college students is shown in Table 6.

**Table 6. Relationship between internet usage and the psychosocial factors among college students**

	Psychological Well-being	Social Interaction	Loneliness
Internet usage	.072*	.081**	-.042

Note. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

**Table 7. Factors contributing to internet usage among college students**

General Details	Predictor variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	't' value
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
R=0.514	Type of College	-11.559	1.214	-.299	-9.518**
R <sup>2</sup> =0.264	Gender	-9.234	1.062	-.265	-8.692**
Adj R <sup>2</sup> = 0.257	Family's monthly income	5.001	1.000	.256	7.785**
F=39.18**	Education of Father	1.258	.400	.103	3.145**
	Education of Mother	-.636	.385	-.055	-1.652
	Internet dependency	.126	.037	.096	3.371**
	Well Being	-.109	0.39	-.049	-3.289**
	Social Interaction	-.270	.068	-.114	-3.975**
	Loneliness	.071	.041	.051	1.754

\*\* Significant at p<.01 level

Table 6 shows positive and significant relationship between internet usage and psychological well-being ( $r = .072, p < .05$ ) as well as between social interaction ( $r = .081, p < .01$ ) of college students. Interestingly, no significant relationship was found between internet usage and loneliness of college students. The Multiple regression analysis was computed to identify the factors contribution to internet usage among

college students and results of the analysis is presented in Table 7. From Table 7, it is found that 26 per cent of the total variance ( $R^2=0.257$ ) of internet usage among the students has been explained by the general details, internet dependency and the selected psychosocial factors related to the student population. The adjusted  $R^2$  attempts to correct  $R^2$  to more closely reflect the goodness of fit of the model in the population, therefore it could be concluded that 51 per cent of the variance (Adjusted  $R^2=0.257$ ) of internet usage is contributed by the selected independent variables. The F value (39.18) indicated that the independent variables significantly explain the variation in the dependent variable, internet usage at  $p < .01$  level of significance. The relative importance of each independent variable in this model is evident from the significant 't' values. It is found that the type of college, gender, family's monthly income, education of the father, internet dependency, well-being and social interaction contribute significantly to the internet usage among the students. The beta values show that internet dependency positively contributes to internet usage of the college students. The positive beta values indicate that higher the internet usage, higher is the internet dependency and higher loneliness among the college students. The negative beta values exhibit that the type of college, gender, education of mother, well-being and social interaction contribute negatively to the internet usage of the college students. These values elucidate that higher internet usage, lower the well-being and social interaction among the college students.

## DISCUSSION

The results pertaining to the psychological well-being among the college students reveal that the female college students had better well-being than the male college students. This finding is supported by Qian da (2016). On the other hand, no significant difference was found on the well-being of the college students based on the level of internet usage and type of college. Moreover, significant correlation was found

between internet usage and psychological well-being of the students. The results with respect to social interaction among the college students reveal that there is no significant difference in the social interaction based on gender of the college students, but significant difference was found between the government and private college students. On comparing the social interaction of the college students with different levels

of internet usage (high, moderate and low usage of internet), no significant difference was observed. But significant correlation was found between internet usage and social interaction. This finding is supported by Gross (2004), as it was reported that the greater the attachment to friends' adolescents feel, the more likely are they to spend time on the internet. The results regarding the loneliness among the selected college students show that the male students felt lonelier when compared to the female students. Also, findings suggest that the private college students felt lonelier when they did not have internet access than the government college students. It is interesting to note that the students who are low and moderate internet users felt lonelier as compared to the high internet users. But no significant correlation was found between internet usage and loneliness among college students. This is in contrast with the study by Kraut et.al (1998). Likewise, Brenner (1997) found that young users felt more lonely or isolated from their social contacts when they spent more time in internet. The results also show that internet dependency positively contributes to internet usage of the college students. The higher the family's monthly income, education of the father, internet dependency and loneliness, higher the internet usage. These values elucidated that higher the internet usage, higher is the internet dependency and higher loneliness among the college students. A study by Shaw and Black, (2008) revealed that internet usage increased perceived social support and self-esteem whereas decreased loneliness and depression. The type of college, gender, education of the mother, well-being and social interaction contribute negatively to the internet usage of the college students. Therefore higher the internet usage, lower the well-being and social interaction among the college students. This finding is supported by Brenner (1997) and Chou (2001).

### Conclusion

With the findings of the current study, it is observed that high internet usage tend to affect the student's psychological well-being, loneliness, and social interaction. Hence, psychologists, educators, and lawmakers must create awareness among the parents and devise an appropriate solution for this addictive behaviour so as to help the students overcome the ill effects of internet usage.

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