INTERNET ADDICTION AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS AT HASSAN UNIVERSITY

Prabhudhara M L

Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Studies in Social Work,
Davangere University, Davangere, India

Dr. Shivalingappa B P

Professor, Department of Studies in Social Work, Davangere University, Davangere, India

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Abstract

The study explores the prevalence and patterns of Internet addiction among postgraduate Social Work students at Hassan University and Sri H.D. Devegowda Government First Grade College, Paduvalahippe, Hassan District. Data were gathered from 64 respondents chosen by stratified random sampling using a descriptive research design. A demographic questionnaire was used in conjunction with Dr. Kimberly Young's Internet Addiction Test (IAT) to evaluate addiction levels and their correlation with sociodemographic variables. The results show that 48.44% of respondents had mild internet addiction, 26.56% had major addiction, and 25% reported normal usage; no cases of severe addiction were found. The distribution was balanced, with slightly more female respondents than male respondents, according to gender analysis. Most of the students (84.37%) came from low-income families and were from rural areas.The findings further reveal that moderate internet use is conducive to academic engagement, while heavy use disrupts attention, learning and relationships. It highlights the importance of awareness programmes, counseling and institutional policies to inculcate responsible digital behavior among students. In general, the study adds to knowledge regarding some of the psychosocial aspects of internet use for postgraduate Social Work students and points towards areas which could support preventative and interventional work.

Keywords: *Internet Addiction, Postgraduate Students, Social Work, Academic Performance, Hassan University, Mental Health.*

Introduction

The 21st century has seen a significant revolution in human life, which is entirely due to advancement in communication technologies and electronics (Castells, 2010). Internet has become fast, easy, and inexpensive means of communication and exchange of information due to these developments. Specifically, wireless technologies have eliminated numerous communication barriers, and they have impacted such industries as social interaction, healthcare, education, and commerce in a considerable way (Dijk, 2020). Internet has transformed the mode of communication, learning and work, and entertainment, which was a luxury and has become a mandatory part of everyday life.

It was formerly time consuming and cumbersome to search a certain information or open a particular file. Nowadays, information is available immediately at our fingertips through emails, digital databases, and computer applications. This has made daily chores such as payment of bills, school records, online shopping and maintenance of social contacts so convenient (Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002). Besides the fact that this digital revolution has made life in the modern society easy and redefined interpersonal patterns of communication, it has brought about something as alarming as Internet addiction, a phenomenon that is increasingly getting common in all age groups around the world (Young, 1998). Individuals within the modern society have increasingly relied on the digital platform to fulfill their social networking needs, source of entertainment, news, and information at the expense of the traditional print and broadcast media. The behavioral pattern has changed especially evidently among teenagers and young adults who are more prone to excessive Internet consumption and often become addicted to mobile devices and being constantly connected to the Internet (Anderson et al., 2017).

The Problem of Internet Addiction

Problematic internet use or internet use disorder is defined as Internet addiction, which is an excessive or compulsive use of Internet that severely impairs relationships, everyday life, academic or work priorities, and mental health (Kuss and Griffiths, 2012). Not being connected to the Internet, users having this condition may find themselves in numerous psychological distresses including constant sense of emptiness, depression, anxiety, irritability, and restlessness (Young and Rogers, 1998). Signs of the disorder include compulsive behavior patterns, development of tolerance and the need to spend more time online, withdrawal symptoms, as well as severe

functional impairment affecting employment, school, sleep and physical health (Davis, 2001).

The use of the internet has been integrated into the learning and teaching processes in the educational field in a big way. In fact, across all of the universities worldwide, students are engaging in academic research, online learning, social networking, gaming, and entertainment that are all based on the Internet (Kuss et al., 2014). The studies performed in different nations reveal the scary statistics of addiction, and there are shocking percentages of students who devote many hours to the World Wide Web every day (Cheng and Li, 2014). These trends have been associated to the decrease in social interaction in person, poor communication abilities, academic performance loss, and other psychological and physiological health problems (Mehroof and Griffiths, 2010).

The Internet has increasingly been utilized by educators as a source of professional development, research, lesson planning and academic resources, so students without proper guidance can easily lose a considerable amount of time browsing through the enormous quantities of Internet-based materials, a considerable portion of which may be irrelevant or not pertinent to the academic objectives of the students. It has been demonstrated that excessive use of online entertainment, in particular, gaming, social media, and streaming platforms, has a negative impact on social development, mental health, and academic performance of students (Kuss and Griffiths, 2017).

Specific Context: Social Work Students

Postgraduate students, especially those pursuing professional programs like Social Work, have their own set of challenges and pressures that could affect their Internet usage behavior. Social Work education requires in-depth fieldwork, engagement with the community, skill building, and consistent academic performance (Collins, 2008). Students pursuing this field are required to manage academic theory with its application, which may require them to juggle multiple responsibilities at the same time. This rigorous academic and professional context could either lead to an increased dependency on the Internet as a stress-relieving tool or create a situation where sound Internet usage practices become difficult to sustain. However, there is a surprisingly small amount of research that has specifically targeted Internet addiction among postgraduate students of Social Work. The majority of the research that has been conducted has been on undergraduate students pursuing medical, engineering, and general degree courses, and there is a substantial gap in the

literature regarding the nature of Internet addiction among students pursuing professional courses such as Social Work (Widyanto & Griffiths, 2006). The academic and professional requirements of Social Work students demand separate research attention.

Study Rationale and Significance

This research study, named the Internet Addiction among Postgraduate Students: A Study with Special Reference to Social Work Students at Hassan University, will fill this important research gap by taking a special focus on the factors, trends, and prevalence of Internet addiction in the postgraduate students of Social Work in the Hassan district in the state of Karnataka. This research study is conducted on students who take higher education in Hassan University campus and in Sri H.D. Devegowda Government First Grade College, Paduvalahippe.

The social implications of this research study are enormous, because uncontrolled usage of the Internet may cause serious adverse consequences on academic achievements, mental health, social welfare and career growth. It is especially important to take good care of the psychological wellbeing and social competence and good lifestyle practices in the case of Social Work students who will be working with the vulnerable sections of the society and addressing social problems in a professional role. The research study findings may be applied to develop intervention programs, awareness programs, and support systems particularly among postgraduate professional students which eventually leads to the promotion of good digital practices and well-being among future social work professionals.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

Aim of the Study

The objective of the research is to have an in depth understanding of internet addiction among postgraduate social work students with a particular focus on the Hasset University college and the Sri H.D. Devegowda Government first grade college in Paduvalahippe, Holenarasipura Taluk, Hassan district.

Objectives of the study

1. To determine the commonality of internet addiction among postgraduate level social work students in the Sri H.D. Devegowda Government First Grade College, Paduvalahippe and Hassan University.
2. To determine the degrees of internet addiction of students as normal, mild, moderate, and severe.

3. To determine the variation between male and female students as regards to their degree of internet addiction.
4. To examine how demographic variables like age, income and family history affect internet addiction.
5. To investigate how postgraduate social work students use the internet and their behavior that results in internet addiction.
6. To give recommendations on how awareness programs can be conducted and ways of curbing internet addiction and getting students to use the internet responsibly.

Methodology

The research design applied in this study is descriptive research design which is used to examine internet addiction among post graduate Social Work students because it enables the researcher to describe the status quo without controlling any variables. It was conducted in the students of Master of social work (MSW) at Hassan University at Hemagangotri Campus and sri H.D. Devegowda Government First Grade College at Paduvalahippe. The reason why these two institutions were selected is that they offer professional training on social work, which incorporates academic training, fieldwork and community work, thus it is pertinent to investigate the effects of internet usage on such students. The entire population (universe) of the study is a population of 125 MSW students in both colleges on the academic year 2024-2025.

A stratified random sampling method was employed to sample 64 students that was half of the population. This was to give a fair and balanced representation of the students since they were stratified into smaller groups based on their year of study (first and second year) and gender (male and female) and randomly selected a representative of each group. The researchers only enrolled students who were taking the MSW program and were not only attending classes and fieldwork, but also willing to provide their consent to participate in the study. Late arrivals to the Social Work program and students who were not present during data collection were not factored in.

This study has gathered both the primary and secondary data. The main information was gathered via a questionnaire, which consisted of two parts: a demographic profile sheet created by the researcher and the Internet Addiction Test created by Dr. Kimberly S. Young, which is standardized. Internet Addiction Test is a popular test, which evaluates the level of internet addiction using the Likert scale of five points and placing the addiction into the categories of normal, mild, moderate, and severe. This was done by translating the

questionnaire into the local language (Kannada) and providing the respondents with the needed instructions to use it in the process of data collection. To support the study, the secondary data were gathered using books, journals, research articles, reports, and genuine websites.

When the data was collected it was then carefully entered into Microsoft Excel so that it could be analyzed. The data were clustered according to demographics variables and internet addiction scores. Interpretation of the results was done by frequency and percentage analysis and the results were presented in tables, bar graphs and pie charts. The research also followed the ethical considerations in the study. This was done by informing participants of the aim of the study and their involvement was voluntary and could be terminated at any time. The participants were treated with dignity, fairness, and respect and the confidentiality of the answers provided and anonymity of the respondents were respected.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of the Participants

Category	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	30	47%
	Female	34	53%
	Others	0	0%
	Total	64	100%
Age	20–21 years	11	17.18%
	22–23 years	36	56.26%
	23–24 years	17	26.56%
	Total	64	100%
Religion	Hindu	61	95.31%
	Muslim	2	3.13%
	Christian	0	0%
	Others	1	1.56%
	Total	64	100%
Residential Area	Rural	54	84.37%
	Urban	10	15.63%
	Total	64	100%
Family Type	Joint Family	26	40.64%
	Nuclear Family	35	54.68%
	Single Parent	3	4.68%
	Total	64	100%
Annual Family Income	Up to Rs. 1,00,000	50	78.12%

	Rs. 1,00,000 – Rs. 8,00,000	10	15.62%
	Above Rs. 8,00,000	4	6.26%
	Total	64	100%
Hours of Using Smart Phone	1–3 hours	26	40.62%
	3–6 hours	24	37.5%
	More than 6 hours	8	12.5%
	Total	64	100%

The demographic data provides us with the insight into the background variables of the 64 postgraduate students of Social Work who participated in the research. The gender representation is that there is a balanced representation of respondents with a slight margin in favor of the female respondents as the female respondents (53) are slightly more than the male respondents (47). This is also reflective of the increased enrolment in social work education by the women.

Regarding age, the dominant group of students (56.26) are of the 22-23 years age group, the second largest group is 23-24 years (26.56) and the third largest group is 20-21 years (17.18). This implies that the sample of respondents dominated by young adults in their early twenties is quite active in internet interactions.

A significant number of the respondents (95.31) are of Hindu faith, with some of them being Muslim (3.13) and some others (1.56). It is also a pointer to the lack of diversity in terms of religion represented by the respondents which could be the mirror of the demographic representation of the Hassan district region.

In terms of residence, it is seen that many respondents (84.37) are in the rural regions, but only 15.63 are in urban regions. This indicates that the education of social workers in this region is inhabited by the rural students and also portrays the acquaintance of rural youth with the use of internet.

The information about the family structure indicates that over half of the participants (54.68) live in nuclear families, 40.64 in joint families, and a very small (4.68) number of respondents lived in single-parent families. This indicates that the current society is gradually shifting towards the nuclear family set up.

Economic background of the respondents shows that a good proportion (78.12) of the respondents have a family income of 100,000 or less annually, hence covering the lower income bracket. The middle-income bracket, whose earnings range between 1,00,000 -8,00,000, constitutes around 15.62 and the high-earner bracket,

which is above 8,00,000, constitutes only 6.26. This indicates that a majority of the students are of humble economic statuses.

When it comes to the usage of smartphones, a larger proportion of the students, 40.62, use their smartphones 1-3 hours a day, and 37.5% use smartphones 3-6 hours. A smaller percentage of students, 12.5, spend over 6 hours on their smartphones, only 9.37 spend less than 1 hour on their smartphones. This serves as a pointer that the majority of the student population wastes quite some time on their smart phones and this could be a contributing factor to their dependence on the internet.

Table 2 Level/Score of Internet Addiction

S. No.	Variables	Frequency	percentage
1	0-30 Normal	16	25%
2	31-49 Mild	31	48.44%
3	50-79 Major	17	26.56%
4	80-100 Sever	0	0%
Total		64	100%

The data analysis presents the distribution of the respondents based on their internet addiction levels. It is observed that 48.44 percent of the respondents are within the category of mild addiction level and this indicates that they use the internet in a moderate manner and occasionally in a manner that influences their life in everyday life. About 26.56 percent of the respondents belong to the major addiction level, and it indicates that they are very addicted to the internet. Approximately, 25 percent of the respondents fall within the normal range indicating that they are using the internet in a good and balanced way. It is also observed that 0 percent of the respondents are below the severe level of addiction.

Table 3 Level/Score of Internet Addiction by Residential Area

S. No.	Variables	Urban area	Percentage	Rural area	Percentage
1	0-30 Normal	4	6.26%	12	18.75%
2	31-49 Mild	3	4.68%	28	43.75%
3	50-79 Major	3	4.68%	14	21.88%
4	80-100 Sever	0	0%	0	0%

The table provided above demonstrates how the level of internet addiction can be distributed among the respondents based on their place of residence. It has been discovered that rural respondents have a high internet addiction level as compared to urban respondents.

Most of the rural respondents (43.75) are at the stage of moderate addiction level which demonstrates moderate addiction to the internet. Nevertheless, in the urban population, only 4.68 percent are in the same rank. Similarly, 21.88 percent of the rural respondents are included in the major addiction level, but 4.68 percent of urban respondents are included in the same level.

Going to the normal level, 18.75 percent of the rural respondents and 6.26 percent of the urban respondents are in the normal level of using the internet. It should be mentioned that both areas have no respondents (0%) who are of the severe level of addiction.

According to the above observations, it is conclusively seen that the rural respondents are more addicted to the internet than their counterparts in the urban areas. This could be explained by the fact that there has been an increment in internet use by the rural respondents recently, causing them to be more dependent on internet activities.

Table 4 Level/Score of Internet Addiction by Family Type

S. No.	Variables	Nuclear family	Percentage	Joint family	Percentage
1	0-30 Normal	12	18.75%	4	6.25%
2	31-49 Mild	14	21.88%	17	26.56%
3	50-79 Major	9	14.06%	8	12.5%
4	80-100 Sever	0	0%	0	0%

The table above indicates the level of internet addiction was distributed among the respondents based on the type of family they belong to. It is observed that the nuclear families and the joint families have the highest proportion of mild addiction of 21.88 percent and 26.56 percent respectively.

In the case of the normal group, 18.75 percent of the nuclear family respondents and 6.25 percent of the joint family respondents have controlled internet addiction. In the case of the major group, 14.06 percent of respondents in nuclear family and 12.5 percent in joint family falls. The severe group has no respondents in both types of families.

Table 5 Internet Addiction Levels/Score by Daily Hours of Mobile Usage

Sl No.	Variables	0 To 1 Hour (%) (Total Respondents)	1 To 3 Hour (%) (Total Respondents)	3 To 6 Hour (%) (Total Respondents)	More than 6 Hours (%) (Total Respondents)
1	0-30 Normal	3.13% (2)	10.94% (7)	9.37% (6)	4.68% (3)
2	31-49 Mild	4.69% (3)	20.32% (13)	18.76% (12)	4.68% (3)
3	50-79 Major	1.57% (1)	9.37% (6)	9.37% (6)	3.12% (2)
4	80-100 Sever	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)

As can be seen, mild addiction (3149 score) is the most prevalent among the respondents who devote 13 hours (20.32) and 36 hours (18.76) online every day. Likewise, major addiction (5079) is reported to be among the respondents who spend 13 hours (9.37) and 36 hours (9.37) a day, mostly.

Respondents using internet normally (0 - 30) fall mainly in the categories of 1-3 hours (10.94) and 3-6 hours (9.37) daily internet users, with a very small percentage (3.13) using the internet under 1 hour.

Table 6 Level/Score of Internet Addiction by Gender

S. No.	Variables	Male Frequency	Male %	Female Frequency	Female %	Total Frequency	Total %
1	0-30 Normal	8	26.66 %	6	17.65%	14	21.88 %
2	31-49 Mild	12	40%	16	47.06%	28	43.75 %
3	50-79 Major	10	33.33 %	12	35.29%	22	34.37 %
4	80-100 Severe	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total		00	100%	34	100%	40	100%

The table indicates the level of internet addiction between male and female respondents.

Most of the respondents, male (40) and female (47.06), are of the mild category of addiction (moderate internet usage). Then there comes the major addiction level in

which 33.33 percent of males and 35.29 percent of females are more addicted to the internet.

On the normal category, males and females exhibit control over internet use of 26.66 and 17.65 percent respectively. None of the male or female respondents are under the extreme addiction.

Based on the findings, it is clear that female respondents are slightly more addicted to the internet as compared to male respondents with the mild and major levels.

Findings

- Gender Breakdown The proportion of female respondents (53%) is a little bigger as compared to the number of male respondents (47%), which is attesting to the equal representation of both the genders with a margin of female respondents.
- Age Breakdown: The age group with highest number (56.26) is in the age group of 22-23 years followed by 26.56 of age group in 23-24 years group, which means that the largest respondent population is composed of young adults in their early twenties.
- Religion: The predominant religion of the respondents (95.31%) is Hindu, then there are Muslim (3.13%), and Others (1.56%). The respondents are not diverse religiously with all of them not being Christians.
- Residential Area: Majority of the respondents (84.37%):Most of the respondents are in rural areas (84.37%), with only few (15.63%), being urban areas indicating that the sample is mostly a rural group.
- Daily Phone Usage: The most significant percentage (40.62) is 1-3 hours daily phone usage, then 37.5 of all users use their phones 3-6 hours daily. Only a small percentage (12.5) spends over 6 hours in their phones with only 9.37 spending less than 1 hour in their phones.
- Family Type: More than fifty percent of the respondents (54.68) belong to nuclear family then 40.64% belong to joint family and 4.68 percent belong to single-parent families showing the trend towards nuclear families.
- Annual Income: The highest percentage of respondents (78.12) belongs to those in the low-income group (below 1,00,000), then there is 15.62 per cent of the middle income group, and 6.26 per cent of the high income group.
- Total Levels of Internet Addiction: A majority (48.44) of the population has mild levels of internet addiction, with 26.56 and 25 respectively, having major and normal levels of internet addiction.

Nonetheless, none of them are intensely addicted to internet.

- Internet Addiction by Area: The internet addiction is also greater among the rural respondents with 43.75% having minor levels of addiction and 21.88% having major levels of addiction compared to urban respondents (4.68% and 4.68% respectively). This indicates that the dependency level is growing in the rural regions.
- Internet Addiction by Type of Family: The respondents with nuclear and joint families have mild levels of internet addiction with a somewhat higher percentage of joint families. But, all of them do not have extreme degrees of internet addiction, regardless of the type of a family.
- Internet Addiction by Daily Use Hours: The respondents who spend 1-6 hours per day on the internet are most addicted to the internet therefore proving that the more hours spent on the internet, the more dependency.
- Internet Addiction by Gender: There are slightly higher levels of internet addiction of female respondents (47.06% mild and 35.29% major) than that of male respondents (40% mild and 33.33% major). Nonetheless, no one has extreme rates of internet addiction making it possible to imply moderate yet certain dependency of both genders.

Suggestions

At the Individual Level

- **Limit Usage**: Check and restrict the usage of the internet.
- **Mindful Browsing**: Use digital wellness tools or screen time apps to track and regulate internet usage.
- **The Offline Activity:** Participate in physical activities and leisure to lessen dependence.
- **Self-control**: Be mindful, meditate and relax in order to manage internet use.
- **Seek Help**: Consult support groups or counselors in case of difficulties in compulsive use of the internet.

At the Family Level

- **Tech-Free Time**: Have times or places in the house where no one is allowed to use the internet or gadgets.
- **Parental Guidance**: It is advisable that parents monitor how use of the internet by children is done and also encourage healthy habits.
- **Open Communication**: Discuss the psychological and social impact of spending too much time in front of a screen with family members.

At the Educational Institutional Level

- **Digital Literacy Programs**: Educate students on the responsible use of the internet.
- **Seminars and Workshops**: Organize awareness campaigns regarding the internet addiction and mental health.
- **Counseling Support:** Provide the access to the psychological counseling to internet overusing students.
- **Participation in Offline Life**: Promote offline sports, cultural and group learning activities in order to have a balance between offline and online life.

At the Government Level

- **Awareness Campaigns**: Raise awareness campaign regarding the perils of being an internet addict, especially in rural regions.
- **Policy Frameworks**: Have national policies about digital wellbeing and responsible use of the internet.
- **Community Outreach**: Support NGOs and programs to provide awareness and counseling services on a grassroot level.

At the Social Work Level

- **Counseling and Assessment**: Social workers are required to detect, evaluate and treat people that present signs of addiction.
- **Community Programs**: Organize awareness campaigns in schools, colleges and in rural places on the effects of internet addiction.
- **Advocacy**: Push digital detox programs, moderate use of the internet, and internet safety.
- **Group Work**: Hold peer support and group counseling in order to exchange experiences and encourage accountability.

Conclusion

- The Internet Addiction survey of the Postgraduate Social Work Students in Hassan University has shown that most students are mildly addicted (48.44%), then majorly addicted (26.56%), and 25% students are on the normal range. This demonstrates that the use of the internet is moderate but slowly shifting to addiction.
- Female and rural students are slightly more addicted than their counterparts. The addiction is more prevalent in students belonging to nuclear families and who spend more time on the internet. The majority of the interviewees have low-income rural roots which indicate that the availability of the internet is extensive irrespective of economic situations. Even though all students are not severely addicted, the

fact that the levels of mild and major addictions are on the rise means that the threat may happen in the future.

- The following collaborative efforts will be necessary in order to prevent the aggravation of the situation:
- Colleges should work on digital awareness, digital counseling, and healthy usage.
- Families should maintain a balance on screen time and perform offline.
- Government and institutions should create awareness and healthy use of the internet.
- Social workers must become significant figures in the counseling, education, and community outreach.

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