

'Psychological distress linked with Internet addiction among students'

This could impact academic performance; early detection crucial, say researchers

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Internet Addiction (IA) among professional college students and its association with psychological distress can impact their academic progress and long-term career goals, reveal studies by researchers from NIMHANS and other healthcare institutions in Karnataka, Kerala, and Maharashtra.

In three studies published



Crucial findings

Total sample size 5,625

MEDICAL STUDENTS	1,763
Severe addiction	0.8%
Moderate addiction	10.4%
Mild addiction	27%

ENGINEERING STUDENTS	1,086
Severe addiction	0.4%
Moderate addiction	9.7%
Mild addiction	27.1%

UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS	2,776
Severe addiction	0.5%
Moderate addiction	16.4%
Mild addiction	29.9%

day, frequency of internet use, and psychological distress (depression symptoms) predicted addiction," Dr. Cherian explained.

"Our studies are a first such attempt to explore Internet use behaviour, among a large group of students doing professional courses across multiple centres and its association with psychological distress, primarily depression," said Shrinivasa Bhat, Department of Psychiatry, K.S. Hegde Medical Academy in Mangaluru, who is one of the authors.

"As this addiction can be detrimental to their education and long-term career goals, early identification and management of IA and psychological distress is crucial," the doctor said.

Another author, Nitin Anand, Associate Professor of Psychology at NIMHANS, suggested that students doing professional courses must be screened for psychological distress and IA. "There is a high possibility that IA and psychological distress co-exist and exacerbate each other. Initiation of such efforts will help in offering referrals to advanced centres for accurate identification and treatment," he said.

Pointing out that about 53.9% engineering students, who knew about IA had made attempts to reduce it, the doctor said this indicated that awareness creation about IA and its risk factors among students and faculty will be a useful initial step towards healthy use of Internet. Studies in future should explore the relationship between IA and depressive symptoms in a more comprehensive manner, he added.

la), who were pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in medicine; 1,086 engineering students from Mangaluru, and 2,776 undergraduate students from universities in Bengaluru and Mangaluru.

While the study on Internet use behaviours, Internet addiction and psychological distress among medical college students has been published in Asian Journal of Psychiatry, the study involving engineering students has been published in the Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine. The third, involving undergraduate university students, has been published in the Industrial Psychiatry Journal.

Quoting the studies, Dr. Cherian said IA among medical students and its association with psychological distress can impact their academic progress and long-term career goals. IA will also indirectly impact the community of healthcare professionals and society. Thus, there is a need to investigate IA among medical

students, he said.

In the study involving medical students, while 27% met the criterion for mild addictive Internet use, 10.4% qualified for moderate addictive Internet use, and 0.8% for severe addiction to Internet.

Among engineering students, 27.1% met the criterion for mild addictive Internet use, 9.7% for moderate addictive Internet use, and 0.4% for severe addiction to Internet.

In the third study involving undergraduate university students, 29.9% met the criterion for mild addictive Internet use. While 16.4% were classified in the moderate addictive use category, 0.5% had severe addiction.

"In all the three studies, addiction was higher among male students staying in rented accommodations. Those who accessed Internet several times a day and spent more than three hours per day on Internet and had psychological distress were affected. Age, gender, duration of use, time spent per

in peer-reviewed medical journals from the end of 2018 onwards, researchers explored Internet use behaviours, Internet addiction among a large group of medical, engineering and university students pursuing other undergraduate courses (a sample of 5,625 students) in south India, and found that Internet addiction is emerging as a major mental health condition among students.

"Our studies show that there is a significant and positive correlation between psychological distress (depression) and Internet addiction," Anish V. Cherian, assistant professor at the Department of Psychiatric Social Work in NIMHANS, who is the corresponding author of the studies, told *The Hindu*.

The researchers from medical colleges in Manipal, Kerala, Pune, and Mangaluru, apart from NIMHANS, employed a cross-sectional study design and chose 1,763 medical students from three colleges in Bengaluru, Mangaluru, and Thrissur (Kera-