

Forum: The World Health Organization (WHO)

Issue #27-01: Measures to address the rise of internet addiction in young adolescents

Written by: Sofia Roldan & Marcello Pecile

Chairs: Sofia Roldan & Marcello Pecile



Guiding Questions as you Read

How does internet addiction specifically affect your nation?

What are the problems in discussion internet addiction and what are ways to solve them?

What are the effect that Internet addiction has on teens.?

Introduction

Key Terms

Gambling
Health institutes
Internet
addiction
disorder

As society advances and technology becomes more common in our daily lives, there is going to be a group of people, in this case, teens, who receive the drawbacks of these changes. One of the said drawbacks is the overconsumption of the internet. It is known as internet addiction disorder (IAD). The prevalence of this condition has not been properly known, with estimates that reach as low as 0.8% of teenagers to 26.7% (Cash et al., 2012). A major obstacle to our awareness of IAD is the lack of scientific consensus for the tools that measure addiction and the classification of these behaviors. Some researchers claim that the amount spent using the internet should be a requirement while others argue that a modification to the criteria of gambling should be employed. There are even some health practitioners who argue that IAD is “a symptom of another disorder such as anxiety or depression rather than a separate entity” (Cash et al., 2012)

Although there has been no study that has shown a causal link between Internet addiction disorder and other disorders or negative behaviors, they do seem to be highly correlated. The academic consensus is that Internet addiction disorder is a good predictor and symptom of depression, aggressive behavior, anxiety, lower self-esteem, mood disorder, and even a higher likelihood of suicide (Tripathi, 2018).

Covid-19 has also negatively impacted the prevalence of IAD due to the fact

that teens are being forced to stay indoors and not interact face to face. 90% of students are physically cut off from their schools, and technology is becoming a necessary tool to interact with each other and learn. This consecutively increases the chance of the disorder occurring. (Lin, 2020) A study showing a 46.8 % increase in internet usage, and 20 times increase at the time of COVID (Sun et al.,2020).



Even though internet addiction has worsened, countries and health institutes have not been keeping up with the disorder. For example, in the latest diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, IAD was not listed in it. Even the World Health Organisation and the internet classification of diseases (ICD-11) has not been recognized as a disorder.

Comprehension Question(s):

- How does internet addiction specifically affect your nation?
- What are the problems in discussion internet addiction and what are ways to solve them?
- What are the effect that Internet addiction has on teens.?

Definition of Key Terms

Adolescents: A transitional phase of growth and development between childhood and adulthood. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines an adolescent as any person between ages 10 and 19.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy: A type of psychotherapeutic treatment that helps people learn how to identify and change destructive or disturbing thought patterns that have a negative influence on behavior and emotions

Cyberbullying: Cyberbullying is the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature. It takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets.

Gambling: The practice or activity of betting: the practice of risking money or other stakes in a game or bet

Gaming disorder: Gaming disorder is the obsessive and compulsive overuse of internet games and video games as an escape from life, resulting in the prioritization of gaming over daily activities and interests and the continuation of gaming despite the negative consequences that may occur.

Health care: Efforts made to maintain or restore physical, mental, or emotional well-being especially by trained and licensed professionals.

Health institutes: A public or nonprofit organization within a state that provides health care and related services.

Internet addiction disorder: When a person has a compulsive need to spend a great deal of time on the Internet, to the point where other areas of life (such as relationships, work, or health) are allowed to suffer.

Current Situation

Key Terms

Term 1:
Adolescents
Term 2: Cognitive
behavioral
therapy:
Term 3:
Cyberbullying
Term 4: Gaming
disorder

For the past couple of years, the internet has advanced and risen in popularity. Many people worldwide started using the internet as a way of entertainment, accessing any type of information, and communicating with others as well. Young adolescents primarily have become so dependent on social media and the internet, which has severely affected their well-being. According to the national library of medicine, internet addiction “is characterized by excessive or poorly controlled preoccupations, urges or behaviors regarding computer use and internet access that lead to impairment or distress,” (Martha Shaw). Adolescents have significantly increased their use of the internet and social media due to COVID-19 lockdown causing none to little interaction between them and the outside world. Various studies have portrayed the different mental health problems that come with internet addiction, which are depression, OCD, and anxiety. Moreover, it has also reduced teens' curriculum study, offline relationships, and affected nutritional diseases.

The WHO organization has worked with various countries on this matter since 2014. In the first conference, they analyzed the physical and psychological consequences of immoderate uses of technology. In the physical health aspect, damage to vision and hearing, as well as injuries generated by the lack of concentration were taking place. The psychological consequences were cyber-bullying, sleep deprivation, aggressive behavior, poor self-confidence, etc.

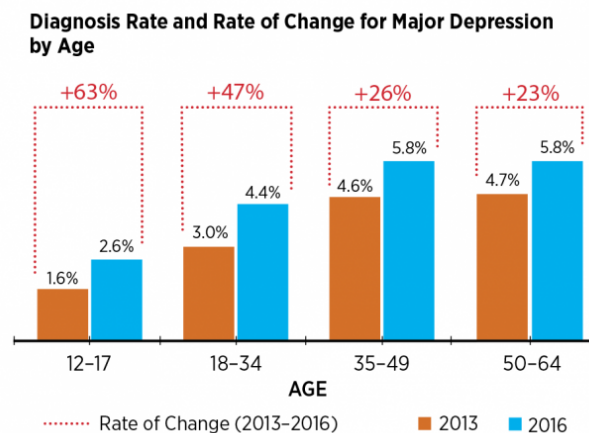
What makes social media addicting to the youth

Social media has 3 billion active users throughout the world, and many of them engage in social media daily. Known platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, Snapchat, and TikTok as well. What makes social media so addicting to people that surround themselves with it, is the power of alike and the effect it has on the brain. A recent study revealed that gaining likes on social media conveys the same activity on the teenage brain as when people eat chocolate or gain money. The dopamine signals in people's brains increase as they log into social media platforms and these

neurotransmitters are linked with pleasure. When people receive likes and positive comments, a rush of dopamine occurs and it makes teens want to experience that “rushing” feeling again.

Effects on Mental and social health

Mental and social health with regards to young adolescents is being gravely affected due to Internet addiction. Many adolescents spend the majority of their time using these platforms through their phones, laptops, and even TVs. Subsequently, they become so addicted that they tend to lose contact with the surrounding world. The internet is seen as a social environment in which cognitive subjects exist. So mental and psychiatric disorders such as low self-esteem, impulsivity, mood changes, and suicide have been seen in young adolescents who suffer from internet addiction. A study containing 2,114 students who had been diagnosed with this addiction, had ADHD symptoms, depression, social phobia, and hostility. Stress, as well as social anxiety, is a primary concern in young adolescents who constantly use the internet and social media. In a study conducted in a medical college where 489 students participated, 52.5% of those who had internet addiction were suffering from social phobia. Additionally, a study conducted by Yusuf Karaer and Devrim Akdemir found that adolescents also suffer from minimum social support and have a higher difficulty communicating and identifying emotions. Young adolescents nowadays use the internet as a defense mechanism to get away from social contact since at that age they tend to be the most vulnerable. They seek comfort on the internet, however they adopt an addiction that ends up causing more harm and less comfort.



Gaming disorder

Internet gaming disorder is a condition where the compulsive and excessive use of video games end up negatively affecting someone's well-being. WHO classified this as a disorder in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) to increase health professionals' attention on the risks it brought as well as a way for countries to consider this when arranging health strategies. People decide to prioritize their gaming and end up disconnecting themselves from other interests and activities. Gaming is utilized as a way to cope with psychological stress from the outbreak and disconnect people from the real world. This concerning problem has significantly increased during the pandemic since adolescents are forced to remain in their homes. Additionally, Verizon reported a 75% increase in online gaming due to stay-at-home measures. What makes video games so captivating is the way gaming companies use persuasive techniques to hook players. For instance, as gamers improve their in-game performance and increase their time playing, they are rewarded with new abilities and higher levels. It is unsettling to think that these games are being designed to be compulsive and addictive as it ends up benefiting companies that engage in gaming apps.

COVID-19 lockdown influence

COVID-19 has had a significant influence on the rise of Internet usage done by young adolescents. For people to maintain physical distance, they've had to prevent leaving their homes which included canceling schools and all social environments. The rise of internet usage because of the pandemic has harmed adolescents' well-being. There was a study conducted where adolescents from various countries, such as Mexico and India, took online questionnaires. Questions were related to social media, the internet, COVID-19, etc. The results of this study showed that people have increased the use of streaming devices during the COVID-19 lockdown and adolescents who suffer from these addictions, scored high on depression, loneliness, etc. Furthermore, many young adolescents also were being over-engaged in playing internet games, especially boys.

Table 4. Duration (in hours) spent on specific online websites before and during COVID-19 related lockdown (N = 185)

	Before COVID-19 M(SD)	During COVID-19 M(SD)	Positive Rank	Negative Rank	
Social media sites	5.37 (3.72)	7.81 (6.86)	17.23	10.06	-2.75*
Gaming	.73 (6.86)	1.54 (2.13)	10.00	.00	-3.87**
Streaming services	5.07 (5.54)	6.09 (5.38)	11.21	10.13	-2.61*
Shopping sites	1.08 (4.70)	.69 (1.17)	2.00	8.43	-3.30**
Well-being sites	.46 (1.16)	.53 (1.18)	4.50	9.00	-1.61

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Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The United States

Even though 1 in 25 teens have internet addiction in the United States (Reuters Staff, 2011), the United States lags in research and public recognition on IAD, with their first publicly funded study coming in 2017 by the University of Connecticut School of Medicine (Booth, 2017). The purpose of this study is to test whether there is suitable evidence to recognize the closely related internet gaming addiction in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) as a disorder. Some blame the lack

of public awareness as a fault of the insurance system because due to IAD not yet being a disorder, insurance companies are not covering it. Making American citizens choose to ignore it as they cannot afford to pay thousands of dollars for treatment.

South Korea

In 2018 a South Korean government study determined that 20% of their population is at risk of internet addiction disorder. This is causing the Korean government to be serious in its response and treatment. They have started camps like the National Center for Youth Internet Addiction Treatment to help teens with the disorder. They “also [have] in-school counseling, screening surveys, preventive disciplines” all of which are government-funded. On the other hand, not all is well with South Korea; e-sports, a major industry in the country, is fearing that the serious responsibility of the government and other health industry companies are causing negative stigmatization of gaming bringing reduced profits to the sport (Sullivan, 2019).

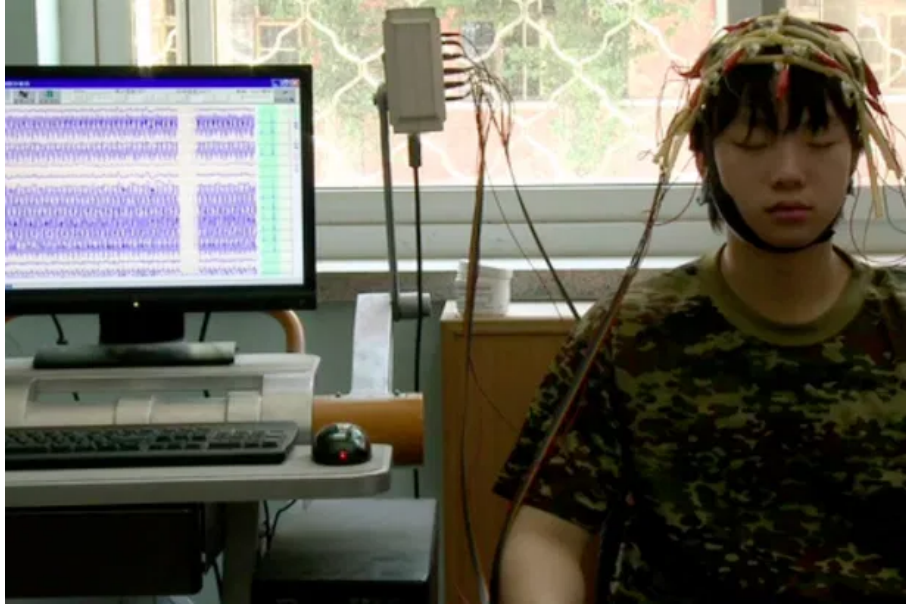
Japan

Even though Japan is similar to South Korea and China in terms of internet users and technology focus. Their response to IAD could not be more different; with a 2013 research paper claiming, “IA relevant researches have not been comprehensively conducted in Japan.” Japan instead seems to focus properly on hikikomori, a term first defined as, “those who withdraw entirely from society and stay in their own homes for more than six months.” Although different from IAD they do seem to be highly linked, with hikikomori spending the majority of the time on the internet, with there being arguments that IAD is a cause of hikikomori, although no study has yet to prove this. The government response to hikikomori has been serious, with Japan's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) publishing a guideline in 2010, and the Japanese government “regards this phenomenon to be of high importance.” (Tateno et al., 2019)

China

China since the beginning has recognized the seriousness of the disorders. With it being the first country in the world to officially recognize it as a mental illness. Although China's response might be a little too serious, in 2003 China opened one of its first

internet addiction facilities. This current facility has had reports of unethical practices to rehabilitate these teens. Li-An 18-year-old died with several external and internal injuries. Her mother stated, "My son's body was completely covered with scars, from top to toe." This and countless other facilities forced patients to dress as soldiers and are submitting teenagers to military-style training. Afterward, presentations of the negative and serious of the internet are done. (Westcott, 2020).



Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event	Internet Disorder Addiction Effects:
1960	The internet was invented by the creation of ARPANET, also known as the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network. Funded by the U.S. Department of Defense (Andrews, 2019).	ARPANET allowed computers to interact with each other in one network. Allows the internet to exist, which is a requirement for people to have IAD.

1969	ARPANET's first message was sent. The message was "Login." and only the first two letters were able to be sent.	The first time the use of the internet was seen and how it can connect other users.
1983	ARPANET was modified using TCP/IP Transmission Control Protocol and Internet Protocol. This created the modern internet, also called networks of networks.	With the modern internet now existing the use of it has started to form. This made the internet mainstream and allowed it to integrate into our daily lives.
1996	The first research on internet addiction was published at the American Psychological Association exploring 600 cases, using a modified version of DSM-IV criteria on gambling (Young, 2017).	This paper started the conversation of internet addiction. Especially in the medical researches community.
1998	An increased number of studies find general patterns of users with what is now called Internet addiction disorder. With findings of the extreme pattern of people with the disorder. Some individuals had sessions on the internet that could last 20 hours a day. These studies are also starting to show symptoms, like disturbed sleep patterns.	Now, with studies that showcase the negative effect of this disorder people are doing further research and are taking it more seriously.
1990-2000	Teachers of Intent addiction, Beard and Wolf, created changes to the criteria on Internet addiction. Adding conditions that must affect the daily life of the user.	New criteria are being implemented affecting how the new studies and researches are being conducted.
1998	The Internet Addiction test also known as IAT was created, and it became the first tool aside from the modified DSM criteria to measure Internet addiction.	Previously measuring internet addiction was an area of disagreement, but now with the main test being formed. The discussion now focused on how internet addiction does to the

		brain and solutions to mitigate the disorder
1999	Researcher, David Greenfield, released a study claiming that IAD is an addictive disorder. With proof that the withdrawal symptoms and tolerance is similar to that of an addictive substance (Ginige, 2017).	With the research narrowing the type of disorder IAD better discussions of solutions could be implemented. With talk of using similar techniques as other addictive-based substances.
2008	The proposal was made to include IAD in the 5th edition Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). This proposal was denied due to "insufficient peer-reviewed evidence to establish the diagnostic criteria and course descriptions." Although a close brother of this addiction - internet gaming disorder - was accepted.	Shows the rising discussion of the legitimacy of this disorder in official medical manuals.
2014-2017	Three meetings organized by WHO were done. 20 Experts from 20 countries like Japan, Korea, and China attended; with 5 WHO attendees. At first, the meetings focused on health implications, diagnostic guidelines but it, later on, shifted to treatment and policy positions to treat excessive use of the internet (World, 2018)	These meetings are the first international cooperation between medical institutions and countries to discuss excessive internet use. Showcasing that discussion of IAD is still in its early stages compared to other addictions, but steps are being done to change it.

Past Action

Additional measurement by South Korea

In 2007, the South Korean government saw the rising time spent that young educated students had on the internet and gaming platforms. A study found that 1.2 million students are at risk of being negative. The South Korean government decided to train 1,043 health practitioners and enlist 190 hospitals. They also added new measures to prevent future addiction in schools (Block, 2008).

Chinese conference on Internet addiction

In 2007 at a conference. Ph.D. and director of addiction medicine, Tao Ran, “reported 13.7% of Chinese adolescent Internet users meet Internet addiction diagnostic criteria.” This resulted in serious measurement by the Chinese government to restrict computer gaming, as hoped to decrease the prevalence risk on IAD. Adding laws to discourage 3 hours or more use of daily video games as of 2008 (Block, 2008).

Opening of Japanese Rehabilitation centers

As of 2014, the Japanese minister of defense has started making plans to open medical facilities to help students be away from computers and phones. This facility will have in-person counselors and will involve outdoor activities (Roncero-Menendez, 2013).

Private medical facilities being opened

A private company called reSTART opened up the first internet medical facility center in the United States, in 2009. Specializing in Internet gaming disorder, video game addiction treatment, gambling, virtual reality, augmented reality, screentime, and social media use. These facilities have “Each person participates in an in-depth proprietary clinical assessment which examines mental, physical and digital health.” according to them (“Mental”).

Special internet addiction Centers

Special internet addiction centers are facilities that help people treat their behavioral disorders and deal with excessive internet use. They seek to help combat and recover from these issues in a supportive and medically supervised environment. The National Institutes of Health reports that the best way to combat this addiction is by seeking a healthy balance for internet usage instead of completely avoiding any use at all. Therapies who specify in this matter and cognitive-behavioral therapies have seemed to work in young adolescents for the past couple of years. Cognitive-behavioral therapy analyses the emotions, thoughts, and behavior of the patient in a way that helps them distress and adapt to health behaviors. Since teens struggle to monitor the amount of internet usage, by being in these facilities, specialized people will help decrease these temptations. People who suffer from depression and anxiety because of this, in these facilities, have the opportunity to take medications as

well. Countries such as Taiwan, India, China, South Korea, the United States and more, are already implementing internet addiction centers. Furthermore, in China 300 centers are located around the country and many adolescents attend them.

UN involvement

The UN has made a significant contribution with regards to the implications that must be made to better address the excessive usage of internet addiction, especially amongst young adolescents. In numerous countries, this has become a public health concern which is why Tokyo held a meeting in 2014 involving WHO. Topics of discussion were the responses from health systems and policies and disorders that were associated with high internet usage concerning behavioral and mental disorders. Future next steps concluded in the meeting were to create a questionnaire by an international expert community to test the impact of internet usage on people's health, and have a meeting in Hong Kong to talk about the policies and health services. The Hong Kong meeting later in 2016 identified the need to develop prevention and treatment programs concerning gaming disorders.

The fourth meeting was held in turkey 2017 focusing more on the clinical and conceptual aspect of gaming problems in adolescents. They looked at and discussed cases from various countries and their clinical management as well. However, it wasn't until 2018 when WHO decided to add gaming disorder on the 11th revision of the international classification of diseases to raise awareness concerning this issue and enhance adequate treatment and prevention. Additionally, it was also added for countries and health professionals to consider this when planning health strategies. In ICD-11 gaming disorder is described as *"a loss of control over gaming behavior; prioritizing gaming over other activities; continuing or even increasing time spent gaming, despite negative consequences."* Other integrated national guidelines and policies include a program for internet treatment organized by the Belarus government and South Korea's second plan to stop excessive internet usage.

Furthermore, WHO has been focusing on conducting activities regarding these issues to come up with solutions on that matter. The United Nations General Assembly

acquired; Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It seeks to achieve 17 goals. One of the DSG's focuses on improving health and well being which targets the issue of excessive internet usage on adolescents.

Possible Solutions

An international consensus on how internet addiction amongst young adolescents should be treated by companies and people is required to minimize the use of devices, games, TV, social media, etc. Developed and well-known companies such as Apple, Google, and Facebook have started implementing control features and other tools to help combat this rising issue. For instance, Apple came up with screen time that projects the amount of time someone has used each app. Daily limits that lock the app after a certain time are also included as an option which can be a limitation with regards to how practical the feature is. Encouraging countries to ensure that these guidelines are being improved and followed by citizens is important to combat this problem.

A therapist or a qualified mental health professional may help treat internet addiction so that people can regain the capacity to use the internet and their devices until they seek a healthy balance. Instead of completely avoiding the use of the internet, people should learn how to control the amount of screen time with the help of professionals in a healthy and supportive environment too. Cognitive-behavioral therapy, as well as group or family therapy, can help in the treatment of adolescents suffering from internet addiction.

Parental control can grant parents the power to monitor and keep track of their children's time spent on the screen. Implementing limitations and rules for kids to follow can help decrease this problem. However, it is crucial to take into consideration that this solution might be limited since it can raise ethical considerations. This can be a problem for some families since people follow different values and beliefs. Thereby, it depends on what extent parental control is ethical for the children and the family itself.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

Internet addiction disorder affects the good health and well-being of the individual with the condition. Although a causal link with internet addiction and its negative effects hasn't been proven yet there is a high positive correlation between IAD and depression, suicidal thoughts, aggressive behavior, lower self-esteem. All these are negative traits that negatively affect the mental well-being of countless young adolescents.

Appendix

I. Links

- A. <https://brandongaille.com/32-interesting-internet-addiction-statistics/>
 1. This link provides various statistics on internet usage and includes a video covering the neuroscience of internet addiction. This will help you go more in-depth on the current situation.
- B. <https://youtu.be/vOSYmLER664>
 1. This ted talk is hosted by the person who first started researching internet addiction disorder. This video can help you come up with possible solutions as well.
- C. <https://www.longdom.org/open-access/internet-addiction-disorder-and-mental-health-in-adolescents.pdf>
 1. Describes the relationship between internet addiction and adolescents' mental health.
- D. https://www.who.int/substance_abuse/excessive_internet_use/en/
 1. This site talks about the WHO involvement in gaming disorder and what countries have done to prevent it
- E. <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2018/september/technology-new-addiction>
 1. Website containing graphs with regards to the negative effect of internet addiction on people.
- F. <https://www.intechopen.com/books/child-and-adolescent-mental-health/internet-addiction-disorder>
 1. Goes in-depth on the history of internet addiction

II. Tips

- A. Make sure to submit every assignment that is given at the time that is due. This will help you avoid procrastination and leave everything to the last minute. It's important to keep in mind that time management is key to strong and effective research.
- B. Instead of only researching about your country, make sure that you also research the other countries' views on the issue so that you have an insight on who you are debating against. By doing so, it will help you develop solid arguments during the conference
- C. It's essential that you check that your research has different, but recent publication years to prevent your information from being biased. Adding on, if it's a policy, make sure that it is still up and running.
- D. A great way to check if the website you are using is reliable and trustworthy is by searching the name of the website and seeing if other sites are saying good things about it. Researching about the author can also help increase your source's credibility.

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