

# Internet Addiction Disorder

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**Abstract—** There has been an explosive growth in the use of internet not only worldwide but in India also in the last decade. There were about 4,536,248,808 active internet users in India in 2019. The term “internet addiction” was proposed by Dr. Ivan Goldberg in 1995 for pathological compulsive internet use. According to Griffith it is a subset of behaviour addiction and any behaviour that meets the 6 “core components” of addiction, i.e., mood modification, conflict, tolerance and withdrawal.

**Index Terms:** Internet, internet addiction disorder, behaviour, problematic internet use.

## INTRODUCTION

There has been an explosive growth in the use of internet not only worldwide but in India also in the last decade. There were about 4,536,248,808 active internet users in India in 2019. The internet is used by some to take out information, to facilitate research, for interpersonal communication also for business transactions. On the other hand, it can be used by some to watch porn films, excessive gaming, chatting for long hours also gambling. There have been growing concerns in India as well as worldwide for what has been labelled as “internet addiction”

Internet Addiction Disorder, also commonly referred to as Compulsive Internet Use (CIU), Problematic Internet Use (PIU), or Disorder. Originally debated as a “real thing,” it was satirically theorized as a disorder in 1995 by Dr. Ivan Goldberg, MD who compared its original model to pathological gambling. Since this hoax of sorts, the disorder has rapidly gained ground and has been given serious attention from many researchers, mental health counsellors, and doctors as a truly debilitating disorder. Though not officially recognized as a disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), its prevalence in American and European cultures is staggering – affecting up to 8.2% of the general population. However, some reports suggest it affects up to 38%

of the general population. The widely variable difference in prevalence rates might be contributed to the fact that no true and standardized criteria has been selected for Internet Addiction Disorder. It is researched differently among scientists and mental health professionals. And, it is researched differently across ethnic cultures.

The term “internet addiction” was proposed by Dr. Ivan Goldberg in 1995 for pathological compulsive internet use. According to Griffith it is a subset of behaviour addiction and any behaviour that meets the “core components” of addiction, i.e., mood modification, conflict, tolerance and withdrawal. While Davis avoided the term internet addiction, referring it as a dependency on psychoactive substances, he instead preferred the term “pathological internet use” (PIU). According to Greenfield the prevalence was about 6% among the general population, while according to Scherer found it to be 14% among the collegebase population. Surveys conducted online showed 4-10% of the internet users meet the criteria for internet addiction. General population surveys show a prevalence of 0.3-0.7%. The addicted averaged 38.5 h/week on a computer, whereas the non-addicted averaged 4.9 h/week. As this 21st century has opened new avenues and horizons of progress and development through advancement in technology, life style, and social relationship. The Internet is a global network. Moreover 100 countries that are linked into exchanges of data, news and opinions. The advancement in study of Internet Addiction Disorder has been negatively impacted by the lack of standardization in this area. It has been generally accepted among researchers, however, that Internet Addiction is only a subset of technology addiction in general. As the name states, its concentration is on compulsion with the Internet – as other areas of media addiction can be seen in television addiction, radio addiction, and other types of media addiction. Due to the explosion of the digital age, Internet

Addiction Disorder has taken the reigns as the top culprit is technology addiction as of late. The troubling thing about this disorder is that if you are suffering from it, you are endlessly surrounded by technology. In the digital age, the Internet has taken over. Most of what we do, as a general population, can be done on the Internet. Can't find that shirt you want in the store? No worries – the Internet has it! Need to place an order for pizza? Why call? Complete an online order! Can't call over a friend to play a video game at 3am when you're suffering from insomnia and can't go back to sleep? I bet there's someone across the globe that is awake and ready to play! That's, in essence, why this disorder can be so troubling – even treatment-wise. It's hard to live these days by getting rid of the Internet. We're always surrounded by it – and for most of us, we use it daily.

Just because you use the Internet a lot – watch a lot of YouTube videos, shop online frequently, or like to check social media does not mean you suffer from Internet Addiction Disorder. The trouble comes when these activities start to interfere with your daily life. In general, Internet Addiction Disorder is subdivided into varying categories. The most commonly identified categories of Internet Addiction include gaming, social networking, email, blogging, online shopping, and inappropriate Internet pornography use. Other researchers suggest that it is not the amount of time spent on the Internet that is particularly troublesome – rather, it is how the Internet is being used. That is, the riskiness of Internet use can be just as important as the amount of time spent. Do you have a teenager using teen dating sites that could have child molesters lurking on the site? This is risky – and one of the multidimensional aspects of Internet Addiction Disorder. Other identified multi-dimensional risk factors of Internet Addiction Disorder include physical impairments, social and functional impairments, emotional impairments, impulsive Internet use, and dependence on the Internet.

#### CAUSES OF INTERNET ADDICTION DISORDER

Internet Addiction Disorder. This disorder is characteristic of having multiple contributing factors. Some evidence suggests that if you are suffering from Internet Addiction Disorder, your brain makeup

is similar to those that suffer from a chemical dependency, such as drugs or alcohol. Interestingly, some studies link Internet Addiction Disorder to physically changing the brain structure – specifically affecting the amount of gray and white matter in regions of the prefrontal brain. This area of the brain is associated with remembering details, attention, planning, and prioritizing tasks. It is suggested one of the causes of Internet Addiction Disorder is structural changes to the prefrontal region of the brain are detrimental to your capability to prioritize tasks in your life, rendering you unable to prioritize your life, i.e., the Internet takes precedence to necessary life tasks. Internet Addiction Disorder. This disorder is characteristic of having multiple contributing factors. Some evidence suggests that if you are suffering from Internet Addiction Disorder, your brain makeup is similar to those that suffer from a chemical dependency, such as drugs or alcohol. Interestingly, some studies link Internet Addiction Disorder to physically changing the brain structure – specifically affecting the amount of gray and white matter in regions of the prefrontal brain. This area of the brain is associated with remembering details, attention, planning, and prioritizing tasks. It is suggested one of the causes of Internet Addiction Disorder is structural changes to the prefrontal region of the brain are detrimental to your capability to prioritize tasks in your life, rendering you unable to prioritize your life, i.e., the Internet takes precedence to necessary life tasks. Internet Addiction Disorder, in addition to other dependency disorders, seem to affect the pleasure centre of the brain. The addictive behaviour triggers a release of dopamine to promote the pleasurable experience activating the release of this chemical. The short-term effects of an online addiction include unfinished tasks, forgotten responsibilities and weight gain. Long-term effects are seen more in the physical symptoms such as backache, neck pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, and vision problems from staring at the screen.

#### SYMPTOMS OF INTERNET ADDICTION DISORDER

Signs and symptoms of Internet Addiction Disorder may present themselves in both physical and emotional manifestations. Some of the emotional

symptoms of Internet Addiction Disorder may include:

- Depression
- Dishonesty
- Feelings of guilt
- Anxiety
- Feelings of Euphoria when using the Computer
- Inability to Prioritize or Keep Schedules
- Isolation
- No Sense of Time
- Defensiveness
- Avoidance of Work
- Agitation
- Mood Swings
- Fear
- Loneliness
- Boredom with Routine Tasks
- Procrastination

Physical Symptoms of Internet Addiction Disorder may include:

- Backache
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Poor Nutrition (failing to eat or eating in excessively to avoid being away from the computer)
- Poor Personal Hygiene (e.g., not bathing to stay online)
- Neck Pain
- Dry Eyes and other Vision Problems
- Weight Gain or Loss

#### HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

Though it is gaining traction in the mental health field – and recently added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as a disorder that needs more research, a standardized diagnosis of Internet Addiction Disorder has not been discovered. This is also a significant contributing factor to the overall variability in the disorder as a whole and wide range of prevalence in the population from 0.3% to a whopping 38%.

One of the more accepted diagnostic assessments of Internet Addiction Disorder has been proposed by

KW Beard's 2005 article in *Cyber Psychology and Behaviour*. Beard proposes five diagnostic criteria in the identification of Internet Addiction Disorder in the general population:

- Is preoccupied with the Internet (constantly thinks about past use or future use)
- Needs to use the Internet with increased amounts of time to gain satisfaction
- Has made unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop use of the Internet
- Is restless, moody, depressed, or irritable when attempting to control Internet use
- Has stayed online longer than originally intended

In addition, Beard (2005) suggests at least one of the following must also be present in a diagnosis of Internet Addiction Disorder:

- Risked the loss of a significant relationship, job, educational, or career opportunity because of the Internet
- Has lied to family members, therapists, or others to conceal their involvement with the Internet
- Uses the Internet as a way of escaping from problems or to relieve a dysphoric mood (e.g., guilt, anxiety, depression, helplessness)

If you have sought help with an Internet Addiction Disorder, you have likely been given a mental test or questionnaire of some sort to assess your dependency on the Internet. The most common assessment tools used to help make a diagnosis of Internet Addiction Disorder include:

- Young's Internet Addiction Test
- Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire (PIUQ)
- Compulsive Internet Use Scale (CIUS)

#### TREATMENT OF INTERNET ADDICTION DISORDER

The first step in treatment is the recognition that a problem exists. If you do not believe you have a problem, you are not likely to seek treatment. Studies have shown that anti-anxiety and anti-depressant medications have had a profound effects on the amount of time spent on the Internet – in some cases decreasing rates from 35+ hours a week to 16 hours a week. Physical activity has also been indicative of effective in increasing serotonin levels and decreasing dependency on the Internet.

Some of the more common psychological treatments of Internet Addiction Disorder include:

- Individual, group, or family therapy
- Behaviour modification
- Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT)
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
- Equine Therapy
- Art Therapy
- Recreation Therapy
- Reality Therapy

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