

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEPRESSION AND INTERNET ADDICTION

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## **Abstract**

As new media are becoming daily fare, Internet addiction appears as a potential problem in young people. From the reported negative consequences, it appears that Internet addiction can have a variety of detrimental outcomes that may require professional intervention. Internet addiction (IA) is an increasingly prevalent clinical entity in adolescents and young adults, but can affect people of all ages. IA can lead to dysfunction in social, academic and work domains, and people affected by it usually share a comorbid psychiatric disorder. Internet users who are compulsive about going online and have more social interactions in virtual worlds than the real one may be depressed, according to a new study. Internet addiction is a newly emergent disorder. It has been found to be associated with a variety of psychiatric disorders such as depression. Information about such coexisting psychiatric disorders is essential to understand the mechanism of Internet addiction. Internet addiction continues to generate controversy on academic and clinical circles, and there has been no consensus regarding its terminology, classification and diagnosis. In the last years, considerable clinical and neurobiological research has been done on the subject, showing interesting findings. A systematic literature research was conducted from many recent studies. Researchers have now identified a number of activities and personality traits associated with Internet addiction. This paper aimed to synthesize previous findings by investigating the interactions between depression and the usage of particular Internet applications as risk factors for Internet addiction. The paper shows that understanding the factors associated with the development of internet addiction will promote future research and will pave the way for the development of addiction treatment approaches.

**Keywords:** *internet addiction, depression, systematic literature research, professional intervention.*

## **Introduction**

Internet is a tool that has socio-economic, cultural and political dimensions in information society. Computer and internet usage has the potential to develop and change the existing social structure of society (Demir, 2006). In our country the internet has become an integral part of daily life as it is all over the world.

Internet delivers some practical tools like entertainment, shopping, social sharing applications which enable accessing knowledge easier and faster together with physical and psychological harms like tiredness, hostility, depression, loneliness. Along with these there are also some educational harms like wasting of time, decrease in academic performance, communication problems with peers. Although internet plays an indirect role on these issues, internet addiction affects these issues directly (Young, 1998).

The addictive use of the internet is a new phenomenon which many practitioners are unaware of and subsequently unprepared to treat. Although there has been no official psychiatric diagnosis which designates preoccupation as an addiction to internet, some professionals propose this phenomenon as an “internet addiction disorder” (Wang 2001). Many studies have discussed the factors related to the internet addictive behavior.

Psychopathology factors such as depression and anxiety, personality factors like self-esteem, the amount of internet use and gender were related to the internet addictive behavior. It should be noted that most of them have also been linked to addiction in other contexts (Kim and Haridakis 2009).

More recently, the importance of research on internet addiction has grown. Studies have utilized various methods to identify, internet addicts, and have used numerous terms such as internet dependents, problematic internet users, or pathological internet users (Davis, 2001; Lin & Tsai, 2002).

The excessive growth of the internet has had a huge influence on psychological research in understanding its role in emotional states and there has been increased interest in the addictive potential of the internet. The authors report that there are a number of emotional factors which may be related to internet addiction (Kandell, 1998). Among these factors the most remarkable is depression. Research on internet addiction and depression demonstrated that the overuse of the internet, which results in a disruption of the normal lives of an individual and the people around him, was associated with an increase in the frequency of depression.

Thus, the aim of the present research is to synthesize previous findings by investigating the interactions between depression and the usage of particular Internet applications as risk factors for Internet addiction. In this study depression is operationalized as an abnormal state of the organism manifested by signs and symptoms such as low subjective mood, pessimistic and nihilistic attitudes, loss of spontaneity and specific vegetative signs.

## **The Concept of Internet Addiction**

As early as 1976, the American Psychological Association (APA) noted that Internet usage could lead to addiction. Clinicians were asked to develop policies and protocols to treat Internet addiction (Chebbi, Koong, Liu, & Rottman, 2007). While Internet addiction has been researched to various degrees, there is no standard for treatment, or even a standard definition.

The phrase *process addiction* has been used by some researchers (Berglas, 2004; Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002) to describe an addiction to an activity or a process such as eating, spending money, cleaning, using the Internet, or gambling. Process addictions have

similar symptoms to substance addictions. Users develop a perceived loss of control, a decline in enjoyment over time, and use a number of defense mechanisms to hide or justify their behavior.

Goldberg defined Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) as a behavioral addiction that acts as a coping mechanism and borrows from substance-dependence criteria from the DSM-IV (Garrison & Long, 1995; Goldberg, 1996). Young presented a second definition for Internet related disorders, Problematic Internet Use (PIU), namely another diagnostic term based on DSMIV criteria associated with pathological gambling (Young & Rogers, 1998).

Physical withdrawal symptoms are not always associated with process addictions as behaviors do not impact the brain in the same way substances do (Reinarman, 2005). Internet addiction, also described as pathological internet use, is defined as an individual's inability to control his or her use of the internet, which eventually causes psychological, social, school and/or work difficulties in a person's life (Davis 2001; Young & Rogers, 1998).

According to some addiction theorists (Peele & Brodsky, 1991). Addictions accomplish something for the person, however illusory or momentary these benefits may actually be. Because of the mental pleasure that people find in their addictions, they begin to behave more intensely about them. For example, an alcoholic is often driven to drink at moments of excessive stress or an overeater is often driven to binge on food during moments of tension. In each case, the compulsive behavior serves to reduce the underlying emotional tension and serves as a reward for future behavior. In a similar fashion, it has been suggested that Internet addicts turn to the computer to find relief from moments of painful states of mental tension and agitation present in their lives. Greenfield postulated that the Internet is not as benign as we might think and has powerful mood altering capabilities, and over 29% of the Internet addicts he studied reported using the Internet to "alter their mood or escape on a regular basis" (Twerski, 1990). In such instances, he found that their use of the computer was less about using it as a tool and more about finding a psychological escape to cope with life's problems. Because the addiction serves a useful purpose for the addict, the sensation or attachment can grow to such proportions that life becomes unmanageable.

### **Internet addiction and psychopathology**

Internet use may be beneficial or begin when kept to 'normal' levels, however high levels of internet use which interfere with daily life have been linked to a range of problems, including decreased psychosocial well-being, relationship breakdown and neglect of domestic, academic and work responsibilities (Young, 1998).

Studies indicated that the potential for negative psychological and social consequences reduced as society became more accustomed to using the internet. Previous studies indicate that people may develop a new lifestyle through internet activities, which may cause a worsening in their actual social relationships. In other words, depressive feelings of people relying on the internet for social support might remain or even worsen toward their real-life interpersonal relationships, increasing their risk of becoming internet addicted (Yu-Chun, 2008).

Recent studies about the internet addiction have focused mainly on three factors which include the personal factors, psychological - social factors, and factors related to the

Internet. The personal factors are such as the low-grade self-reliance, introverted characteristics, instinctive behaviors, immediate tendencies, and deficiencies in communication skills. The social psychological factors include the social factors such as poor support from the family members and which are originated from the poor communication among the family members. And finally, the factors related to the Internet, such as long term use of Internet, quick and easy access to it, and having high skills in using it, which all play important roles in the internet addiction (Dargahi, Razavi SM. 2007).

One of the basic individuals' psychological needs in all scientific and ethical levels and degrees is the need to have a certain amount of self-esteem. Self-esteem is as a positive or negative individuals' attitude towards themselves and their overall assessment of self-value sense. The more, people fail to achieve self-esteem, the more they will be undergone the anxiety, depression, emotional insecurity, suspicion about themselves, escaping from the reality, and feeling of inadequacy. High self-esteem in an individual creates the sense of self-confidence which enables him to adapt to difficult situations (Bisinger C, Laure P, France AM. 2006).

The relationship between the Internet addiction and self-esteem has been reviewed in several studies which have shown the personality traits, self-esteem, and psychiatric disorders associated with the Internet addiction (Greenberg, J.S., Lewis, S.E. & Dodd, D.K. 1999).

### **Depression and Internet addiction**

Depression is symptoms of dysphoric affect and mood, loss of interest in life activities and feeling of hopelessness (Derogatis, Melisaratos, 1983). Internet addict adolescents have been reported that depression, lower self-esteem and lower life satisfaction. Clinical depression associated with increased levels of internet usage (Young, Rodgers, 1998).

Several cross-sectional survey studies have found that internet use was associated with more symptoms of depression in adolescents, derived from low self-esteem, fear of rejection, and the desire to be acknowledged. Regarding locus of control (the individual's belief about the extent to which he/she is in control of his/her life). Chak and Leung (2004) found that greater dependent use of the internet was negatively linked to internal locus of control. On the other hand, externality was found to be positively related to internet addiction. They reported that internet addiction group had higher degree of loneliness and depressed mood compared with the non-addicts group, while other findings indicated that loneliness, depression, and computer self-efficacy were significant factors of problematic internet use (Ceyhan and Ceyhan 2008).

It has been discovered that children and youngsters using internet much are becoming lonelier and experience difficulties in making contact face-to-face. It is also emphasized that communication through internet is quite important for today's youngsters and computer games and internet may cause social isolation replacing the friend of child or youngster (Gross, 2004). While it has been indicated in several studies that there is a relation between internet addiction and loneliness it is shown in another study that there is not any relation between loneliness and internet addiction (Hills and Argyle, 2003).

Although there are many studies showing that there is a relation between internet addiction and depression; there is not any relation between internet addiction and depression according to several studies (Sanders et al, 2000; Niemz, Griffiths and Banyard, 2005).

It is discovered in the studies related to internet addiction that loneliness, depression and self-esteem are important variables. In these studies it is found that there are different findings between loneliness, depression and internet addiction and self-esteem has not been studied much.

## Conclusions

As noted with other addictive disorders, this document suggests that clinical depression is significantly associated with increased levels of personal Internet use.

This study suggests that accurate assessment of depression can improve early detection, especially when one is masked by primary symptoms of the other diagnosis. It is likely that low self-esteem, poor motivation, fear of rejection, and the need for approval associated with depressives contribute to increased Internet use, as prior research indicated that the interactive capabilities available on the Internet were found to be most addictive. It is plausible that depressives are drawn to electronic communication because of the anonymous cover granted to them by talking with others through fictitious handles, which helps them overcome real-life interpersonal difficulties.

The disappearance of facial expression, voice inflection, and eye contact makes electronic communication less threatening, thereby helping the depressive to overcome the initial awkwardness and intimidation in meeting and speaking with others. This anonymous two-way talk also helps depressives feel comfortable sharing ideas with others thanks to the personal control over the level of their communication, as they have time to plan, contemplate, and edit comments before sending an electronic message.

Based on the findings, it is concluded that evaluation of suspected cases of Internet Addiction should include assessment for depression. These results, however, do not clearly indicate whether depression preceded the development of such Internet abuse or if it was a consequence.

Therefore, the possibility exists that increased levels of social isolation subsequent to excessive time spent in front of a computer may result in increased depression rather than be a cause of such Internet overuse. Finally, although it is unclear how Internet Addiction compares to other established addictions, future research should investigate if clinical depression is an etiologic factor in the development of any addictive syndrome, be it alcohol, gambling, or the Internet.

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