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Impact of Psychological Distress On Problematic Internet Use Among Young Adults

Sri Abarnambigai A[1], Mr. Krishnamoorthy M[2]

[1]Master of Science in Medical Psychology,
Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research (Deemed to Be University)
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences
Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research (Deemed to Be University)

Introduction

Psychological Distress:

People feel bad when they think they cannot deal with the things they to do. This is called distress. It is like feeling unhappy. worried all the time. You might feel sad get angry feel tense and have trouble doing everyday things like you normally do. Psychological distress is not a diagnosis from a doctor but it is a way to describe how people feel when they are not comfortable with their emotion. It can include feelings like those people have when they are depressed, anxious or stressed as some researchers like Drapeau and others found out in 2010. Psychological distress is a state where people feel unhappy and uncomfortable with their emotion. It can be similar, to depression, anxiety and stress.

Psychological distress is like a problem that can be mild or really bad. It can be a little stress that goes away quickly or it can be very severe emotional pain that makes daily life tough. Psychological distress is a thing according top Ridner in 2004. It is not about feeling bad it is about how it affects your whole body and mind. When people experience distress they might have trouble thinking clearly like they cannot focus. They might feel really sad or anxious all the time. People, with distress might also change how they behave like they stop going out with friends or they avoid talking to people. Psychological distress is not seen as one problem in systems that diagnose issues. The main parts of psychological distress are clearly in the ICD-11 classification.

- The ICD-11 says that depressive episodes are times when people have a mood that lasts, they have less energy and they are not interested in things and they also have problems like they do not sleep well or they have trouble paying attention. The ICD-11 says this.
- The ICD-11 also says that anxiety disorders are when people have much fear, they worry all the time and their body is always, on high alert, which makes it hard for them to live their daily life. The ICD-11 says too.
- The world health organization has a list of stress-related problems in the ICD-11. This includes things like adjustment disorder. Adjustment disorder happens when people have a lot of behavioural issues after something big happens in their life. The world health organization said this in the ICD-11 in 2019.

The world health organization show that stress is a deal. It has a lot of parts to it. People can feel different emotions and act in many different ways when they are stressed. Young adults have a tough time with their emotion. They have to handle a lot of changes like school work figuring out they are, money problems and not knowing what they want to do with their lives. Some studies have found that young adults get stressed out and feel overwhelmed often than older adults, like the study done by Arnett in 2014. Other people have also looked into this. Found that dealing with school pressure and big life changes can make young adults more likely to feel depressed, anxious and stressed as seen in the research, by Bayram and Bilgel in 2008.

Placed on them exceed their ability to manage those demands. Since this assessment is subjective, two people facing the same situation may react very differently based on their interpretations and the coping resources they think they have. After that we think about how we can deal with a situation. We look at what we have the stress like our strength, skills to cope help from family or friends ability to solve problems and past experiences with similar problems. When we feel like we have help or inner strength the situation doesn't seem so bad and doesn't upset us as much.

- We consider our strength.
- We think about our skills to cope with stress.
- We look at the support from our family.
- We look at the support, from our friends.
- We think about our problem-solving abilities.
- We think about our experience.

The model has an important part and that is how we think about things. This thinking process is called appraisal and it happens in two parts: the first part and the second part. When we do the part we try to figure out if something that happens is not important is good for us or is bad for us. If we think it is bad, for us then we think about how bad it can be. We think about if it can hurt us if it can help us to grow or if it is already hurting us.

This first part helps us to know how we should feel about what's happening. Cognitive appraisal is a deal because it is how we decide what cognitive appraisal means to us. However, when they think lack the skills or support to handle the stress, they are more likely to feel anxious, helpless, or emotionally distressed. This personal evaluation is important because even small challenges can feel very stressful when a person feels unprepared or unable to cope.

Emotion-focused coping is about dealing with feeling that come with stress. This can means avoiding the problem for a bit telling yourself it's not that serious expressing your emotions or seeking comfort, from others. When people mainly use avoidance or ineffective coping methods their emotional tension usually gets worse of better. As a result feeling stressed gets worse. Can last a long time. When people find better ways to deal with it like getting help using their time wisely or figuring out solutions the stress usually doesn't feel as bad.

The transactional model says that stress and coping are things that change over time. When things happen or we get information we always look at situation again. Young adults have to deal with a lot of changing things that cause them stress, like going to school not being sure about their career having money problems and trying to live up to what other people except from them. The transactional model is, about how stress and coping are dynamic processes. So the transactional model helps us understand that young adults and stress and coping are closely related. Their coping resources making fluctuate, making them more susceptible to experience psychological distress during periods of transition or instability. This theory therefore provides a useful framework for understanding why certain young adults experience higher level of distress and how their perception and coping behaviours shape their emotional well-being.

COGNITIVE APPRAISAL THEORY:

The cognitive Appraisal Theory that Lazarus came up with in 1991 helps us understand why people get upset. It is about how people think about what happens to them in life. The cognitive appraisal theory says that it is not what happens to us that makes us upset. What it means to us. We do this by thinking about whether it's bad, for us if it is a challenges or if it can hurt us. The cognitive appraisal theory is important because it helps us see that people get upset because of what they think not because of what happens. Events perceived as threatening-such as academic pressure, conflicts, or uncertainty-activate emotional reactions that can lead to tension, anxiety, or sadness. This first appraisal determines whether a situation is personally significant and whether it carries potential negative consequences.

After we first look at a situation we start to think about how we can deal with it. This is called appraisal. We think about what we can do to make things better and what help we have. This help can come from things like being good, at solving problems being able to handle our own personal strengths. If we think we can handle the situation we will not be as upset. We will not feel as much stress. We will think we have what it takes to deal with the problem and that will makes us feel better.

The theory also shows that it is really important to think about things which is called reappraisal. This is when people think about a situation in a way because they have learned something new or things have changed. People are always thinking about what's happening so they can feel more or less upset depending on whether they start to think that a situation is something they can handle or something that is very bad. This is what happens with distress it can go up and down over time because people are always thinking about situations, in new ways. The theory is talking about reappraisal. How people us reappraisal to think about things again and again.

For adults life can be really tough because they have to deal with a lot of changes at school with their friends and at home. This can be very upsetting, for them. The cognitive appraisal theory says that how people feel when they are stressed depends on what they think is happening not what is really happening. What young adults think and believe and how they handle problems are very important when we try understand why some things make them feel stressed and overwhelmed.

Consequences of Psychological Distress

Psychological distress can really get to people. Affect many parts of their life. It can change the way they think, behave and feel. It can even affect the way they get along with others. We all feel down sometimes. That is okay. When these bad feelings do not go away and start to overwhelm the person that is when

psychological distress becomes a big problem. Psychological distress is something that can be very hard to deal with. It can affect people in many different ways.

1.Emotional and Psychological Effects

Psychological distress can really affect our stability over time. Everyday problems that we normally handle easily can start to feel like a deal. Our emotions can change quickly. We can feel happy. Then suddenly feel really sad or we can feel calm and then get angry. People who are dealing with distress often say they feel like they are always worried, about something they feel tired all the time or they feel like they are not themselves anymore. Psychological distress can make people feel this way because it affects their stability. Over time, the mind may become consumed by negative thoughts, self-doubt, or despair, making it increasingly difficult to envision possibilities or solutions.

2. Cognitive and Thinking-Related Consequences

When we are dealing with dealing with distress it can really mess up our ability to think clearly and make good decision. It becomes hard to focus on things our memory does not seem to work well and even simple things feel like a lot of work. Our thoughts, about distress can jump all over the place going from one worry to another and that creates a kind of mental mess that makes it tough to concentrate on psychological distress. Individuals may find it hard to plan, organize, or solve problems due to a sense of mental overload. Rumination-the incessant replaying of troubling-can drain mental energy, leaving little room for creativity or reasoning.

3. Behavioural and Functional Consequences

Daily habits and responsibilities can stop to change when we feel distressed all the time. Some people may stop doing things they usually do and avoid their responsibilities can also change when some people keep themselves very busy to take their mind off things make them uncomfortable. When daily habits and responsibilities change like this people may not feel like doing anything, which can cause them to put things off not get done and have a hard time finishing tasks. This can really hard to do the things we need to do. Essential self-care practice, including regular meals, hygiene maintenance, and adhering to sleep schedules, may being to suffer. What once felt manageable may now seem taxing, and a feeling of being “stuck” may set in.

4. Social and Interpersonal Effects

Getting together with people can be really scary so we avoid seeing our friends, family or going to community events. Talking to people can be really tiring small arguments can feel like a deal and our relationships with friends and family can get worse because we do not feel like sharing our feelings. Some people will stay away, from others because they do not want to be a burden or they are afraid of being misunderstood. As support systems dwindle, feeling of loneliness and disconnection tend to intensify, deepening the emotional challenge.

5. Physical and Health-Related Consequences

Distress starts in the mind. We feel it all over our body. When we are emotionally upset for a time it can give us headaches make our muscles tight and cause stomach problems. We might not feel like eating.; we might feel tired all the time. Some people have trouble because they cannot stop thinking while others

sleep much to forget about their problems. Our body stays ready to react which makes it hard to rest and takes away our energy. If we are distressed for long it can weaken our body's ability to fight off sickness make us more likely to get ill and lead to long term health problem, chronic issues. Distress can really affect our body. Make us feel unwell .

PREVALENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

Psychological distress has become increasingly common among young adults in recent years, reflecting the growing pressures associated with modern life. Many individuals in the 18-25 age group are navigating a critical development stage marked by transition, uncertainty and heightened expectations. As they attempt to balance academics demands, early career responsibilities, financial concern, identity formation, social expectations and personal aspiration, emotional strain often accumulates and becomes difficult to manage. What once might have been occasional stress can gradually develop Into persistent feelings of anxiety, sadness or exhaustion that interfere with daily living.

Young people over the world are dealing with a lot of emotional problems. More and more young adults are saying they feel anxious all thee time they are always down they have trouble focusing talk about how hard it's to do well in school and also handle their social life and personal stuff. Young people are really struggling with this. They have to do in school but they also have to deal with their friends and family and other things that are important, to them. A similar trend is seen in working adults who are under pressure, at work face unstable jobs have to complete for performance and do not have many support systems. They face challenges that often not noticed. This leaves them to deal with it on their own they get really upset.

In India studies show that many young adults are struggling with health issues. This is not a problem for certain jobs or areas. Many young people have a time dealing with their emotions and they often feel anxious, stressed and depressed. Mental health issues are a problem for young adults in India and it is something that affects them in many different ways. Young adults, in India are experiencing a lota of health problems including anxiety, stress, and depression. The rise in psychological distress among youth has been linked to rapid lifestyle shifts, increased dependence on technology, changing social structure, competitiveness, and reduced access to supportive environments. While some people feel a little to moderately upset others feel really overwhelmed emotionally. This emotional strain can affect how well they do in school their relationships with others their job performance and overall happiness, in life.

The high prevalence of psychological distress among young adults suggests that emotional vulnerability has become a widespread concern rather than an isolated problem affecting only a small portion of the population. This growing pattern shows that we need to understand the struggles that young adults are dealing with today. It is really important to see that psychological distress is a problem, for public health. We have to look at struggles of young adults and know that psychological distress is something that affects a lot of people. It also shows we need to look into how people who are really upset try to deal with their feelings. Many of them might turn to media or online spaces because they are easy to get to and might give them some temporary comfort. The things that make us feel a little better for a short time. Like spending too much time online. Can sometimes make things worse or create new problems. We have to think about how people cope with their emotions and if using spaces is really helping them. Given the substantial number of young adults experiencing psychological distress and the diverse ways in which it affects daily functioning, examining its consequences and its connection with coping behaviours such as

problematic internet use is both relevant and essential. Understanding prevalence not only draws attention to the scale of thee problem but also strengthens the justification for preventative and supportive interventions that prioritise the emotional well-being of young people.

PROBLEMATIC INTERNET USE:

Problematic internet use or PIU is when someone's online activities get out of hand. They spend much time online and its starts to interfere with their daily life. It's not, about using the internet a lot. PIU is when someone can't control their habits. They feel a need to stay connected all the time. This can lead to problem like not getting sleep doing poorly in school straining relationships or neglecting daily tasks. According to young in 1998 these are some signs of PIU. Problematic internet use can really disrupt a person life. People think that problematic internet use is a problem even through it is not officially listed as a disorder. Scholars think this is a behavioural pattern because it has things like compulsive behaviour and getting emotions tied up in it. It is also hard for people, with problematic internet use to stop using the internet. This is what Davis said in 2001 about problematic internet use.

Young adults are the ones who get affected the most. Their daily life is connected to internet in many ways like school work talking to friends and having fun. This group of people also has to deal with a lot of stress from school not knowing if they will get a job and what others think of them. Because of this young adults might use the internet to take their min off things feel better or find someone to talk to as people, like Kuss and Lopez-Fernandez found out in 2016. When you use the internet to deal with stress or feeling down it can give you some relief for a while. This can start to happen over and over and you will spend more time online. This can make it hard to gets things done mess up your sleep. Make you not want to spend time with people in person. The internet use can really change how you live your life. This is what happened in a study by Elhai and other people, in the year 2017.

Theoretical frameworks help us understand how people intend to use the internet. Cognitive-behavioural perspectives show that the way people intend to use the internet think can affect how long they stay online. For example; if someone thinks the internet is the place where they can feel safe or happy they might spend more time online. This idea is supported by a study from Davis in 2001, about people intend to use the internet. Additional theories suggest that individuals might report resort to the internet to fill emotional voids or address unmet psychological needs, especially when real-world settings feel daunting or unsupportive (Elhai et al., 2017). These concepts underscore that PIU stems not solely from the accessibility of the internet but also from personal vulnerabilities and emotional requirements.

The thing with problematic internet use and all the things that can happen to young people like problems at school feeling sad and having trouble with friends is that it is a big deal for people who study mental health in young adults. If we can understand what problematic from happening later and help young people because they are more likely to have problems, with problematic internet use (Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez 2016)

CONSEQUENCE OF PROBLEMATIC INTERNET USE (PIU)

Problematic internet use can change the way people think, feel and act. It affects parts of daily life. What starts as browsing or searching online can become a habit. In this habit the online world becomes more important than real life experiences. As people rely more on the internet other things start to suffer. Their

responsibilities, well-being and relationship with others may not be as important. The effects of this can be small at first. They can get stronger and more disruptive over time. Problematic internet use and its impact on life can be significant. It can reshape how individuals interact with the world , around them and how they view internet use.

1.Psychological Implications

When people use the internet too much their emotional stability is usually the first thing that gets messed up. Of dealing with tough emotions or handling stressful situations people might hide in online world to escape. This means they do not get to practice ways to cope with problems so they feel more upset and it gets harder to calm down. They might feel really happy one minute. Really sad the next or they might feel anxious all the time and empty inside. The more someone tries to make themselves feel better by being online the more they need it. This creates a bad cycle. Internet use makes emotional problems worse and emotional problems make people use the internet more. This cycle is hard to break because the internet use and emotional strain keep making each other worse.

2.Effects on Thinking and self-control:

Problematic Internet Use (PIU) can change the way you think and control yourself.It can affect how you focus and behave. You might find it hard to concentrate for a time because of constant notifications. Switching between apps and feeling like you need to stay updated all the time does and help. Some tasks may seem much to handle. These tasks require planning or a lot of effort over time. You might struggle to organise your thoughts. You may find it hard to resist doing things on impulse. You might also struggle to stick with tasks that do not give you rewards. Offline activities like reading, studying or having conversation may feel slow. They may not be as exciting, as the pace of online activities. This can make you less productive and less motivated.

3.Academic and word -Related impact

When you have trouble thinking and you are not motivated your school work and job can suffer. You might not study like you used to. You might find yourself thinking about other things when you are iin class or at work like what is happening online. You might miss deadlines. Not finish things you need to do and your performance at work or school might not be as good as it used to be. This can be really frustration for a lot of adults and they might be too hard, on themselves which makes them want to go online even more to escape and that just makes the problem worse. Academic and work-related impact is a deal because it affects Icademic and work life. Academic and work- related impact can lead to problems like not being able to do your job or school work and that is why it is so important to think about academic and work-related impact.

4.Interpersonal and social consequences

People are spending time communicating digitally, this might leave time and emotional energy for real relationships. They might start to withdraw from society. They get less willing to talk face-to-face. Their family or friendship ties can get weaker. Online chats are easy. They do not always give us the depth or emotional connection we need. They can make people feel lonely. They can be misunderstanding and conflicts. They happen when what we do online starts to interfere with the time we share or the responsibilities we have, in our relationships.

5.Physical and lifestyle-related outcomes

Spending a lot of time online can be bad for physical and lifestyle-related outcomes. When you are online for hours you usually do not move around much. You also tend to have sleep habits and poor physical and lifestyle – related outcomes. Staying up at night because you are online can mess up your body ‘s natural schedule. This can make it hard to focus and have energy. People often complain about pain, headaches, feeling back pain from sitting too much. Not having a routine can also make you eat food and forger to take care of yourself. These changes, in your physical and lifestyle related outcomes can make you feel more stressed which can make your online habits even worse.

TYPES OF PROBLEMATIC INTERNET USE

Problematic internet use is different for each person. It is usually described as spending much time online. People do this in different ways. Some people like to do things on internet because it makes them feel better because they like it. Each type of problematic internet use has its reasons and its own problems. It helps us see how being, on the internet much can hurt our well being. We need to understand the types of problematic internet use to see how it affects us.

1.Social media overuse

Social media is a problem for some people. They use social media like Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp or X much. These people feel like they have to check their messages all the time. They want to respond to messages away and see how many likes and comments they get. This makes them feel important and likes by others.

The need to be seen and connected on social media all the time can be very bad for people. It can make them feel like they are only worth something if they get a lot of likes and comments on social media that what happens in real life. This can make them compare to others and feel bad about themselves and get really upset if someone does not like them on social media. Social media can be a problem because it can make people feel bad about themselves and care too much about what others think of them on social media**.**

2.Online gaming Addiction

Online gaming can be a way for some people to forget about the stress and problem they have in their life. When people play games with others or compete against them they can feel like they have done something they belong to a group and they know who they are. Sometimes this can also make them want to keep playing all the time and they will stay online for a long time. Some people have a time stopping themselves from playing games so they will not sleep, they won’t do their school works and they will not do their job. The people who feel this feel like being excited, being angry and feel good when they win can make them want to play more and which make them feel like their life of gaming is interesting

3.Compulsive streaming and entertainment consumption

There is a type of behaviour that involves spending too much time watching online entertainment. This includes watching a lot of web series, movies, and short videos on you tube or other streaming apps. For a lot of people these platforms are a way to deal with feeling sad, bored or alone. It Is okay to watch something every then to take off things. If you do it all the time it can cause problems with how you use

your time, how you sleep and how you get along with others. Some people cannot stop watching compulsive streaming and entertainment consumption even when they know it is bad, for them.

4.Problematic online shopping

It is easy to buy a things when you are feeling stressed or down. You can just. Buy something right away. For some people buying things online becomes a way to deal with their feelings of buying things that they really need. This can cause money problems, feeling guilty, or hiding what you bought. This can make a cycle where you buy things because you feel bad and then you feel bad because you bought those things and you regret your online shopping

5. Online Gambling and betting

Digital gambling platforms can become addictive due to the unpredictable reward cycle and the illusion of control. Individuals may continue spending money despite repeated losses, driven by the hope of winning 'just one more time'. This form of problematic use is associated with financial problems, family conflict, shame, and high level of emotional distress.

6. Excessive Online Surfing or Information Seeking

Some individuals become absorbed in endless browsing, news-checking or information searches. While curiosity is natural, compulsive information seeking can lead to procrastination, increased anxiety, and difficulty focusing on important tasks. The constant need to stay "updated" may crowd out real-world engagement and contribute to mental overload.

Prevalence and statistical evidence for problematic internet use:

The thing with problematic internet use is that it has become a problem for people health. This is happening because more people have access to the internet and they are using their phone all the time. They are also using the internet a lot for talking to friends learning things and having fun. Over the ten years more and more people have been having problems, with problematic internet use in both in rich and poor countries. Problematic internet use is still an issues and it is getting worse. Lots of evidence shows that teenagers and young adults who are online the most are really struggling with this. Some studies have found different numbers of people are affected because they used ways to figure it out and they had different ideas about what is problem. Also the people in the studies were different which is why the n umbers are the same and that is due to things like factors and the criteria thresholds that were used and the assessment methods were not all the same, which is why we see different prevalence rates, for teenagers and young adults. A lot of people have a problem with using the internet. The internet is a part of their lives and some of them use it too much. We see that many young individuals are spending much time on the internet. This is a problem because it can be bad for them. Many young people are using the internet in a way that's not good for them. The internet use of young individuals is a cause, for concern because it can be additive

People around the world have different experience with internet use. International studies on internet use show difference, with some studies finding that only a small number of young people are affected, while others find that almost half of the young people they talk to are affected. Some big studies say that 7 to 14 percent of people in general are affected by internet use problems. When you ask university students you get much higher numbers, like 20 percent or even more, than 40 percent. Internet use problems or what

we call internet use problems seem to be getting worse since the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because people had to stay and use the internet more for school and work and they also used the internet more to talk to their friends. The thing about PIU is that it is not something that we need to sorry about for a little while. PIU is something that will be around that will be around, for a time. It is connected to the way we live our lives and how we use things. As people change the way they live and use things PIU is still a problem. PIU is a part of our lives because of the way we live and the digital habits we have.

In India people have found that students and non-students are having a lot of problems with internet use. When look at the numbers from places you see that around 20% of people are having issues when you use the usual standards to measure it. If you used a more relaxed standard the numbers get much higher often over 40%. When you look at kids in school you see that a lot of them than one in five are having problems with using the internet in a way that is not good for them. Some kids are having big problems with internet use. It also interesting that studies with adults who are working show that problem, with internet use are not just happening in school. Internet use problems are happening in places too and this is something that people should know about internet use problems. Some studies looked at students and people who just started their careers. What they found was that more half of these people had problems with how they used the internet. This shows that people who work are also likely top spend much time on the internet. The Internet is a problem for working people just like it is, for students and other people who use the internet a lot.

There are differences in the number of people of people who have problematic internet use across different studies. This is because of reasons like the tools used to measure it such as PIUQ and IAT are not the same. People also define internet use in different ways like what is mild moderate and severe. Some places have access to technology than others and the people in the studies are all different. But one thing is clear: problematic internet use is a problem that is getting worse. Problematic internet use is very common among adults and this shows that we need to do something, about the emotional and behavioural problems that come with using the internet too much. Problematic internet use is a deal and we need to deal with it.

Moreover studies keep showing that high levels of PIU are linked to psychological problems. These problem include anxiety, depression, stress, sleep issues and feelings of loneliness. This means PIU is not a behaviour it is also connected to mental health problems and poor coping strategies. We need to know more about how common PIU's so we can find groups that are more, at risk and come up with ways to prevent it.

In India many studies are not done on adults who are students and employees. We need research on this group. A study that uses proven tools like DASS-21 and PIUQ-18 can help us understand how common internet addiction is and how it affects health. This kind of research can help schools, office, counselling services, and public health programs to find internet use among young adults.it can also help us know how to make young adults use the internet in a way. Young adults are very important. We need to take care the internet health. They study can give us information, on how to make them use the internet safely.

Davis Cognitive Behavioural models

The Davis cognitive-behavioural model from 2001 is one of the ideas to explain how people get caught up in problematic internet use. This model says that people do not get stuck on the internet just because some people have problems inside that make them do things online. Davis says these problems are things

like feeling bad about yourself thinking things about yourself having a hard time with feelings and not being good, at dealing with people. This Davis cognitive-behavioural model is important to understand problematic internet use. When people have to deal with uncomfortable situations in their daily lives the internet becomes a nice place to go to because it gives them comfort, something else to think about or it makes them makes them fell like they are part of a group. This is something that was noticed by Davis back, in 2001.

This model is really about how certain thoughts can be very bad for us. These are thoughts that're not true or that do not help us like when wee think things that are not really about how things are. For example the model talks about cognitions that make people think things like "I am only accepted by people when I am, on the internet" or "the internet helps me forgot about my problems". Other people think "it is easier for me to talk to people through a computer because I feel safer that way" and these thoughts are what the model calls cognitions. These thought patterns make people like interactions better so the internet seems more fun, than real fun. This starts a cycle where the person uses the internet more and more to deal with their emotions. The internet becomes a part of their life and they get really obsessed with being online. They have a time stopping even when bad things happens because of it like what Davis said in 2001.

Davis makes a difference between problematic internet use and generalized problematic internet use. Specific problematic internet use is when someone spend much on time one thing online like playing games, using social networking sites or chatting with people. Generalized problematic internet use is when someone does a lot of things online and they are all out of control. Both types of internet use are based on the things: people thing in ways that don't help them and they are emotionally vulnerable. The idea is that people who feel lonely, anxious or depressed might like being online because it gives them control they can be anonymous. They don't have to deal with as much pressure from other people. This makes them use the internet more and more as a ways to cope with their problems according Davis in 2001.

In summary, the Cognitive–Behavioral Model emphasizes that PIU is chiefly a psychological issue driven by internal cognitive patterns and emotional needs, rather than just excessive technology use. This model lays a robust groundwork for understanding why young adults—who frequently encounter academic pressures, identity conflicts, and emotional ups and downs—are especially prone to creating problematic online engagement patterns

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND PROBLEMATIC INTERNET USE

The increasing presence of digital technology in daily life has made internet use an essential part of communication, education, and entertainment. However, when internet use becomes excessive, uncontrolled, or emotionally driven, it can develop into Problematic Internet Use (PIU), a behavioural pattern associated with psychological, social, and functional impairment (Young, 1998). At the same time, psychological distress—a state characterised by symptoms of anxiety, depressive mood, tension, and emotional discomfort—has become more prevalent among young adults due to academic demands, social expectations, and shifting life responsibilities (Drapeau et al., 2012). Recent studies consistently highlight a strong connection between psychological distress and maladaptive patterns of internet use.

Psychological distress often alters how individuals cope with negative emotions and stressful experiences. According to the Compensatory Internet Use Theory (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014), individuals who

experience emotional strain may turn to online activities to distract themselves, regulate their mood, or escape real-life stressors. This compensatory behaviour temporarily reduces distress but increases the risk of relying on the internet as a primary coping mechanism. As a result, emotionally overwhelmed individuals may spend more time online seeking comfort, entertainment, or social reassurance, eventually leading to compulsive use. Similarly, cognitive-behavioural perspectives suggest that emotional vulnerability—such as persistent anxiety, rumination, or low mood—heightens the tendency to engage in repetitive online behaviours (Davis, 2001). When individuals struggle with psychological distress, their capacity for self-control may be reduced, making it harder to monitor and limit their online activities. Over time, excessive internet use can worsen sleep quality, reduce social interaction, and increase isolation, thereby intensifying the very distress the person was trying to escape. This cyclical pattern creates a bidirectional relationship in which distress increases PIU, and PIU, in turn, exacerbates distress.

Furthermore, research indicates that people experiencing distress are more likely to seek online environments that offer immediate emotional rewards—such as social media validation, gaming immersion, or streaming entertainment (Elhai et al., 2017). Although these activities may provide short-term relief, they do not resolve underlying emotional difficulties. Instead, they reinforce avoidance-based coping and maintain the cycle of problematic use.

Overall, the relationship between psychological distress and PIU reflects a complex interaction of emotional vulnerability, maladaptive coping strategies, and behavioural reinforcement. Understanding this link is essential for designing interventions that address both emotional well-being and digital behaviours in young adult populations.

Research gap:

Although a growing body of research has examined psychological distress and problematic internet use independently, there are still several important gaps that limit full understanding of how these two issues interact within young adult populations. Many existing studies have focused primarily on adolescents or school-aged students, leaving the unique experiences of young adults aged 18–25 — who face different emotional pressures and life transitions — comparatively underexplored. This period involves critical developmental tasks such as academic advancement, entry into the workforce, financial independence and identity formation, yet the emotional challenges associated with these transitions remain insufficiently examined in relation to digital coping behaviours.

Additionally, a large proportion of previous research has been conducted within college or university settings, often excluding young adults who are employed or not engaged in formal education. As a result, findings may not generalise to working young adults who encounter different stressors, workload demands and patterns of technology use. Very few studies have compared psychological distress and problematic internet use across both students and working youth within the same sample, creating a gap in understanding broader variations in vulnerability and coping mechanisms.

Another limitation in existing literature is the heavy reliance on general descriptions of internet addiction without examining the psychological processes that drive excessive digital engagement. While several theoretical models highlight emotional vulnerability as a key mechanism, empirical research often fails to integrate these frameworks or measure distress using standardised and validated tools. Many studies rely

on varied assessment methods and inconsistent cut-off scores, making it difficult to compare prevalence rates and behavioural outcomes across populations.

Furthermore, research exploring how psychological distress may contribute to or intensify

problematic internet use is still developing. Although correlations have been reported, fewer studies investigate this relationship using rigorous quantitative approaches within contemporary Indian young-adult contexts. Given the rapid growth of technology use in India, shifting digital lifestyles and evolving cultural expectations, it is essential to generate updated evidence that reflects current patterns of behaviour and mental-health needs. Taken together, these gaps highlight the need for research that investigates the relationship between psychological distress and problematic internet use among young adults aged 18–25, including both students and working individuals, using validated measurement tools. Addressing this gap will contribute valuable insights into how emotional difficulties influence digital coping behaviours and will support the development of effective strategies for prevention and intervention.

YOUNG ADULTS:

Young adulthood, generally defined as the stage between 18 and 25 years, represents a pivotal life phase characterised by transitions such as pursuing higher studies, entering professional roles, and building new social bonds (Arnett, 2000). In this stage, individuals gain greater autonomy but also face intensified psychological and social demands, which can heighten their susceptibility to stress, anxiety, and depression. Moreover, young adults are among the most frequent consumers of digital technologies and online platforms (Twenge, 2019), which raises their likelihood of engaging in problematic online behaviours. Recognising Internet addiction within this population is particularly important, as it may disrupt academic progress, strain personal relationships, and compromise overall mental well-being (Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Lee et al. (2023) did a study on teenager to see how internet gaming disorder (IGD) Social media addiction, smart phone addiction, stress and finding meaning in life are connected. They wanted to know the symptoms of technology addiction and how they relate to stress, depression and finding purpose. The study included 742 teenagers aged 12=19 years. They found the withdrawal was a symptom of IGD mood modification was central to smartphone addiction. Tolerance was a symptom of social media addiction. Stress was an underlying factor. Depression, feeling lost, Anxious about meaning and avoiding meaning were closely linked to all three types of addiction. The study showed that IGD, social media addiction and smartphone have some overlap. The researchers noted that because the study was done at one point in time they could not figure to out cause and effect. They suggested that future studies should follow people over time to understand better how stress, finding meaning and technology addiction are connected.

Lee and Chen (2021) did a study to see how peoples internet use, mental health and sleep are connected during the COVID-19 pandemic. They knew that people had to stay and were using their smartphones and social media a lot. So they wanted to find out if using smartphones and social media much was causing people mental health problems. They also wanted to know if sleep problems were making things worse. They asked 11,014 teachers in China to fill out a survey. What they found out was that people who had a

lot of sleep problems were also very stressed out. Using smartphones and social media much was linked to mental health problems for these people.. Sleep problems made the link between social media use and mental health problems even stronger. This was not the case for smartphone use. The study shows that using too much media can make people more stressed out especially if they are not sleeping well. However this study does not tell us for sure if social media use causes health problems or not. It just tells us that there is a link between the two. The study is important because it says we need to think about sleep when we are trying to understand how internet use affects our health. Lee and Chen's study is about internet use and how it affects peoples mental health.

Wang, Mati and Cai(2021) did a study. They wanted to see how sleep quality affects the relationship between internet use, gaming and stress in college students in China. The study had 1,040 students who were 16 to 26 years old. The researchers found that students who used the internet much and played games too much did not sleep well and were more stressed. They also found that poor sleep quality was a part of why internet use causes stress. In fact sleep quality was responsible for a quarter of the stress caused by internet use. On the other hand , sleep quality was not as big of a deal when it came to gaming. It only accounted for 18% of the stress caused by gaming. So the study shows that sleep quality is very important when it comes to internet use and stress. However it is not as important when it comes to gaming and stress. The problem with this study is that it only looked at a point in time. So we cannot say for sure what causes what. The people who did the study think it is very important for college students to use the internet in a way and get good sleep to reduce stress. Wang, Mati and Cai think this because internet use and sleep quality and gaming are all connected to stress in some way.

Theodoratou et al. (2024) did a study to see how much using the internet is related to feeling stressed and having a good life. They wanted to know if people who use the internet a lot have mental health problems and a lower quality of life. They also wanted to see if things like age and job status make a difference. The people in the study filled out a questionnaire on the internet. This questionnaire asked about how stressed they felt and how good their life was. It also asked about their internet use and other personal things. The results showed that people who are stressed often have things in common like being of a certain age or having a certain job. The same thing was true for people who use the internet a lot. They also found that people who use the internet a lot are often stressed. This is important because it means that using the internet a lot might make people feel worse. The people who did the study think that we need to help people with their internet use and their mental health at the same time. The study found that problematic internet use is linked to feeling stressed and having a life. Theodoratou and the other people who did the study think that this is a problem. They want to help people who use the internet a lot. The study is important because it shows that we need to do something about internet use. Theodoratou and the other people who did the study want to help people have better lives. They think that we can do this by helping people use the internet in some way. The people in the study filled out a questionnaire to measure how stressed they felt. This questionnaire is called the K-6 Distress Scale. They also filled out a questionnaire to measure how good their life was. This questionnaire is called the World Health Organisation Quality of Life instrument. The people who did the study used these questionnaires to get an understanding of how problematic internet use affects people. Theodoratou and the other people who did the study found that problematic internet use is a problem. They think that we need to help people who use the internet a lot. The study is important because it shows that we need to do something, about internet use.

Wong, Yuen and Li (2015) did a study to look at how people use the Internet in a way. They used a theory called Self-Determination Theory to understand this issue. The researchers wanted to know if not getting basic psychological needs met. Like feeling in control being good at something and having relationships. Can lead to using the Internet in a way. They did this by checking if people feel distressed which includes feeling depressed, anxious or stressed. The study had 229 university students in Hong Kong. The students filled out tests to see how much they used the Internet in a way, how distressed they felt and how well their basic psychological needs were met. The researchers used a kind of analysis to see if their ideas were correct. The results showed that when people's basic psychological needs are not met they feel more distressed.. When they feel more distressed they use the Internet in a problematic way.. When the researchers looked directly at how basic needs relate to Internet use they did not find a connection. This means that feeling distressed is the reason why not getting basic needs met leads to problematic Internet use. The study's model fit well with the data, which supports their ideas. The findings suggest that people who do not get their psychological needs met might feel more emotional distress. This makes them more likely to use the Internet in a way, as a way to cope. However the study does not prove cause and effect because it was done at one point in time and only with university students. The study is important because it shows that we need to help people get their basic psychological needs met and deal with distress to prevent and treat Internet use.

Chen et al. (2024) did a study to see how many older Chinese teachers had problems with using the Internet much and how this affected their mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. They wanted to know what happened to these teachers mental wellbeing when they used the Internet much at different times during the pandemic. The study found that a lot of these teachers around 24.5 to 27.4 percent had problems with using the Internet over three years. Using the Internet much was linked to feeling stressed and upset. When they looked closer they saw that this happened because the teachers were scared of COVID-19 they did not like teaching and they felt burned out from their jobs. So when these teachers used the Internet much they felt more stressed and upset and this happened in two ways: directly and indirectly. The study shows that using the Internet much is bad, for the mental health of older teachers.. Because of how the study was done we cannot say for sure that using the Internet too much causes these problems. The study says we need to help teachers use the Internet in ways and take care of their mental health.

Islam and Hossin (2016) did a study to see how many graduate students in Bangladesh used the Internet much and if it caused them stress. They also wanted to know what kinds of students were more likely to use the Internet much. They asked 573 graduate students from Dhaka University to fill out some surveys about their Internet use and their mental health. They found out that 23.9% of the students used the Internet too much. More men, students from families, smokers and students who did not exercise had problems with Internet use. The study showed that students who used the Internet much were more likely to be stressed. Even when they accounted for things like age, income and habits, students who used the Internet much were over two times more likely to be stressed. This link between Internet use and stress was strong. It seemed that using the Internet too much added to stress. Because the study was done at one time we cannot say for sure if using the Internet too much causes stress or not. The study tells us that using the Internet much is linked to poor mental health in young adults. This means we need to find ways to prevent this and do research to understand it better.

Anand et al. (2018) did a study to see how many medical students in South India have Internet Addiction (IA) and how it affects their health. The study aimed to find out how bad IA is and if it is linked to depression in doctors. A total of 1,763 MBBS students aged 18 to 21 years from colleges in Bangalore, Mangalore and Trissur took part. They used a form to get details Young's Internet Addiction Test (IAT) to assess IA and the Self-Report Questionnaire (SRQ-20) to assess psychological distress mainly depression. Results showed: 27% of students had IA, 10.4% had IA, 0.8% had IA. Internet Addiction (IA) was more common in males, those who stay in rented places, use the internet many times a day spend over 3 hours online daily and those with psychological distress. Depression was a predictor of IA. The study found that many medical students have IA, which could harm their studies and future goals. However the study does not show cause and effect because it was done at one point in time. The findings stress the need for detection and help for IA and mental health issues in medical students. The study results highlight Internet Addiction (IA) and its effects on students. The study results also highlight the need for help**.**

Sharma and Sharma (2018) did a study to see how Internet addiction affects well-being in 440 students in Central India. They used a test called Young Internet addiction test to check for internet addiction. They used another test called Ruffs Psychological well-being scale to check well-being. The study found that people who are addicted to the Internet do not have proper psychological well-being. The more someone addicted to he internet the lower they score in things like being independent and being able to handle their environment growing as a person having relationship, having a purpose in life and accepting themselves. The study also found that internet addiction cause psychoogical well-beingbecause of the way the study was done. The study that suggest that using too much internet can be bad.

Singh, Datta, Gupta, and Batra (2022) conducted a cross-sectional study to examine predictors of problematic internet use (PIU) among adolescents, young adults, and middle-aged adults in India during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sample consisted of 1,027 participants aged 13–60 years. Standardized measures of perceived stress, coping strategies, mental health symptoms, and lifestyle indicators were administered, and multiple regression analyses were performed. The findings revealed that younger age significantly predicted higher PIU, indicating greater vulnerability among adolescents and young adults. The effect of COVID-19 emerged as significant independent predictors. Age-specific analyses showed that self-blame and substance-based coping predicted PIU in adolescents; stress, somatic concerns, rumination, and disrupted routine predicted PIU in young adults; and work-related stress and COVID-19 impact predicted PIU in middle-aged adults. Importantly, repetitive thoughts and actions were the only consistent mental health predictor, suggesting that PIU may function as an independent maladaptive behavioural pattern rather than merely a symptom of depression or anxiety.

Pundir, Andrews, Binu, and Kamath (2016) conducted a cross-sectional study among 1,108 college students aged 18–25 years in South India to examine the association between problematic mobile phone use (PMU), psychological distress, and self-esteem. The study gauged Problematic mobile phone Use (PMU) through self designed scale PMUS and found a rate of 26.8%. Psychological distress was present in 5.8% of participants, while 13.2% reported low self-esteem. The findings revealed a significant association between PMU and psychological distress, with problematic users reporting higher mean GHQ scores compared to normal users. Lower self-esteem was also significantly associated with PMU. The research found that additional factors linked to above average PMU are being male, smartphone usage, use of multiple chatting apps, being in a relationship, negative relationship with mother and using a mobile

phone very frequently. Though the study design does not allow for casual inference, it shows that young adults problematic phone use has a link with psychological distress as well as low self- esteem.

Kumar et al. (2025) conducted a cross-sectional study among 423 undergraduate and postgraduate students in Tamil Nadu to examine the relationship between social media–related internet use and psychological distress. This study used Internet Use scale and Kessler Psychological Distress scale (k10), The study found that 26% of students overused the internet for social media activities. Excessive users spent significantly more time on social media (an average of 3.57 hours per day) compared to nonexcessive users and were more likely to maintain multiple social media accounts. Instagram emerged as the most frequently used platform. Importantly, more than half of the excessive users said that they were experiencing mild to severe psychological distress. Psychological distress, Internet use score and average social media usage hours were found to be positively correlated.The findings suggest that higher engagement in social media, particularly prolonged usage and multiple platform involvement, is associated with increased psychological distress among young adults. However, due to the cross-sectional design, causal relationships cannot be established.

Venugopal et al. (2021) conducted a nationwide cross-sectional online study to assess the prevalence and predictors of psychological distress during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in India. Using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), data were collected from 846 participants across 21 states. The findings revealed that 35% of respondents experienced significant psychological distress. Younger individuals (below 40 years), those distressed by lockdown measures, individuals whose fear increased due to social media information, and those reporting increased food consumption during lockdown had significantly higher odds of psychological distress. Logistic regression analysis identified lockdown-related distress, social media–induced fear, younger age, and altered eating patterns as significant predictors.The study highlights the widespread psychological impact of the pandemic, emphasizing the role of social media exposure and lockdown-related stress in exacerbating mental distress. However, due to its cross-sectional design and online sampling method, causal relationships cannot be established.

Vadher et al. (2019) conducted a cross-sectional study among 1,312 school-going adolescents (Grades 10–12) in Bhavnagar, India, to assess the prevalence and predictors of problematic Internet use (PIU). The Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI), Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN), Internet Addiction Test (IAT), and Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) are examples of standardised tests, the study found that 16.7% of adolescents exhibited problematic Internet use, while 3% met criteria for Internet addiction. Adolescents with PIU were significantly more likely to experience social anxiety disorder, poor sleep quality, and lower quality of life. A moderate positive correlation was observed between PIU severity and social anxiety. Regression analysis revealed that social anxiety, poor sleep quality, lower life satisfaction, male gender, higher duration and cost of Internet use, and activities such as social networking and gaming significantly predicted PIU. The findings suggest that problematic Internet use among adolescents is closely linked with psychological vulnerability, sleep disturbances, and reduced well-being. However, due to the cross-sectional design, causal relationships cannot be determined.

Bisen and Deshpande (2020) conducted a large cross-sectional study among 1,600 college students in India to examine the prevalence, predictors, and psychological correlates of internet addiction (IA). Using standardised tools including the internet diction test (IAT), Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), and Barrett Impulsiveness Scale (BIS-11), The study reported a prevalence of

12.5% for internet addiction. Students classified as internet addicts showed significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and impulsivity compared to non-addicted students ($p < .001$). Strong positive correlations were observed between IA and depression, anxiety, and various dimensions of impulsivity. Regression analysis identified male gender, younger age, technical disciplines (particularly engineering), early academic years, and urban residence as significant predictors of IA. Excessive daily internet use, higher monthly expenditure on internet services, online chatting, pornography use, and reduced real-life social interaction were also associated risk factors.The findings highlight that internet addiction among Indian college students is closely linked with emotional distress and impulsive tendencies. However, as the study employed a cross-sectional design and self-report measures, causal relationships cannot be established.

Malik et al. (2023) conducted a cross-sectional study among 505 Indian adolescents (aged 12–17 years) to examine the relationship between psychological distress and social media addiction, and to explore the mediating roles of fear of missing out (FoMO) and boredom proneness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using standardized measures including the PHQ-4, Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS), Trait-State FoMO Scale, and Short Boredom Proneness Scale, the study found a significant increase in social media use during the pandemic compared to pre-pandemic levels. Psychological distress was positively associated with social media addiction and significantly predicted addictive use. Importantly, both FoMO and boredom proneness partially mediated the relationship between psychological distress and social media addiction. Adolescents experiencing higher distress were more likely to report greater FoMO and boredom proneness, which in turn increased the likelihood of problematic social media use. The findings support compensatory and I-PACE models, suggesting that adolescents may turn to social media as a coping mechanism for negative emotional states. However, due to the cross-sectional design, causal relationships cannot be established.

Liang et al. (2022) explored how psychological distress contributed to Internet addiction (IA) among 552 young people aged 17–28 years during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that 28.1% of participants met the criteria for Internet addiction, indicating a noticeable rise during the pandemic period. Psychological distress was significantly associated with higher levels of FoMO (fear of missing out), boredom proneness, and Internet addiction. More importantly, the study showed that FoMO and boredom proneness acted as important psychological pathways linking distress to Internet addiction. Young individuals experiencing anxiety and depressive symptoms were more likely to feel left out or socially disconnected, which increased their urge to stay online. At the same time, prolonged isolation and reduced real-life stimulation heightened boredom, further pushing them toward excessive Internet use. The mediation analysis revealed that a substantial portion of the relationship between psychological distress and Internet addiction was explained through these two factors. Overall, the findings suggest that during stressful situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, young people may rely on the Internet to cope with emotional discomfort, especially when driven by social insecurity and boredom. However, because the study used a cross-sectional design, the direction of these relationships cannot be firmly established.

McNicol and Thorsteinsson (2017) investigated the relationship between Internet addiction (IA), psychological distress, and coping responses among 449 adolescents and adults aged 16–71 years. Participants were recruited through online platforms and classified as nonproblematic, problematic, or addictive Internet users. The study found that higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress were

significantly associated with greater Internet addiction. Maladaptive coping strategies, particularly avoidance and emotion-focused coping, were strongly linked to problematic and addictive Internet use. Age-specific patterns were also observed. Among adolescents, IA was mainly associated with high rumination, greater use of discussion forums, and lower self-care. In adults, IA was predicted by engagement in online gaming and sexual activities, high anxiety, and avoidant coping. Importantly, avoidance coping mediated the relationship between psychological distress and Internet addiction in adults, suggesting that individuals who use the Internet to escape emotional discomfort may be more vulnerable to addictive patterns.Overall, the findings emphasize that coping style plays a crucial role in understanding Internet addiction, beyond psychological distress alone. However, due to the cross-sectional design and self-report measures, causal conclusions cannot be drawn.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants in the present study consisted of 113 young adults aged between 18 and 25 years. These participants were selected from Chennai city and nearby areas. Young adults were chosen because this age group frequently uses the internet for academic, social, and entertainment purposes, making them an appropriate population for studying problematic internet use. A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria of the study. Initially, participants were approached through online platforms such as social media and WhatsApp groups, where information about the study and the questionnaire link were shared. In addition, some participants were approached in person in educational institutions and community settings, which helped include individuals from different educational and occupational backgrounds. The inclusion criteria for the study were young adults aged 18–25 years, individuals who were able to read and understand English, regular internet users, and those who were willing to participate voluntarily in the study. Participants were excluded if they were below 18 years or above 25 years, unable to read or understand English, unwilling to participate, or reported having any known psychiatric or chronic illness. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee of Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research. All participants knew what the study was, about. They agreed to take part after being told what it meant. Participants were also told that their answers would be kept private and secret. The information gathered would only be used for studying and research. Participation in the study was completely voluntary, and no financial compensation was provided to the participants. The selected sample of young adults provided adequate data to examine the relationship between psychological distress (depression, anxiety, and stress) and problematic internet use.

INSTRUMENTS

The socio-demographic sheet

The socio-demographic sheet, a semi-structured data sheet designed by the Principal Investigator, was used to gather core background information about each participant. Details include name/initials, age/date of birth, gender, education, occupation, marital status, family type (nuclear, joint, extended, or alone), and

area of residence. It gives an idea of the demographic profile of the study population and helps contextualise the study findings.

Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire (PIUQ)

The PIUQ (Demetrovics, Szeredi, & Rózsa, 2008) is an 18-item self-report scale to assess problematic internet use. It measures three dimensions: Obsession (preoccupation and withdrawal), Neglect (ignoring daily responsibilities and social life), and Control Disorder (difficulty limiting internet use). Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale from never to always, with higher scores indicating greater severity of problematic internet use. The scale has reliability and validity making it suitable for young adult populations.

Depression Anxiety Stress Scales- 21 (DASS-21)

The DASS-21 is a self-report questionnaire developed by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995) to assess three dimensions of psychological distress: Depression, Anxiety, and Stress. It contains 21 items, with 7 items per subscale, rated on a 4-point Likert scale from 0 (did not apply to me at all) to 3 (apply to me very much or most of the time).Higher scores indicate greater levels of distress in each domain. The DASS-21 is widely used in research due to its reliability, validity, and brevity, making it suitable for use among young adults.

PROCEDURE:

The cross sectional correlation all study investigated the Impact of Psychological distress on problematic internet use among young adults.Participants aged 18 to 25 years were approached and invited to take part in the study. Before data collection, participants were given information about the study purpose, what they had to do and their right to stop being part of it at any time without facing any time without facing my issues. They knew they could quit the study whenever they wanted. An information sheet was provided to help them understand the study and make an informed decision about participation. After explaining the study, informed consent was obtained from all participants who agreed to take part. Data were then collected using self-report questionnaires. Participants first completed a socio-demographic data sheet to provide basic background information. This was followed by the Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire (PIUQ) to assess problematic internet use and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale – 21 (DASS-21) to measure levels of psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, and stress.The questionnaires were administered either online or in person through Google Forms , depending on the convenience and availability of the participants. Participants were asked to answer the questions honestly. The entire process of completing the questionnaires took approximately 20–30 minutes. Throughout the study, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and the responses were used only for academic and research purposes. Participation in the study was completely voluntary, and no financial or other compensation was provided to the participants.

HYPOTHESIS:

H1: There is a significant relationship between psychological distress and problematic internet use among young adults.

H2: Psychological distress significantly predicts problematic internet use among young adults.

RESULT

This chapter contains the findings of the study based on the statistical analysis of the collected data. The data were analysed using IBM SPSS STATISTICAL For windows, version 29.0 (Armonk, NY: IBM CORP.). Descriptive statistical methods were used to summarize categorical variable such as demographic characteristics of the participants. For continuous variable, the mean and standard deviation (SD) were calculated. To examine the relationship between the study variables, Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted. In all statistical analyses, a probability value of $p<.05$ was considered statistically significant. The result of the analyses are presented in the following tables with appropriate explanation.

Sample Characteristics

Table 4.1 *Distribution of participants Based on Gender*

The sample consists of 113 young adults aged between 18 to 25 years who participated in the study on the impact of psychological distress on problematic internet use

	Frequency	Percent
female	79	69.9
Male	34	30.1
total	113	100.0

Finger 1

Table 4.1 presents the distribution of participants according to gender out of the total sample (N=113), the majority of the participants were female (n=79, 69.9%), while 34 participants (30.1%) were male.

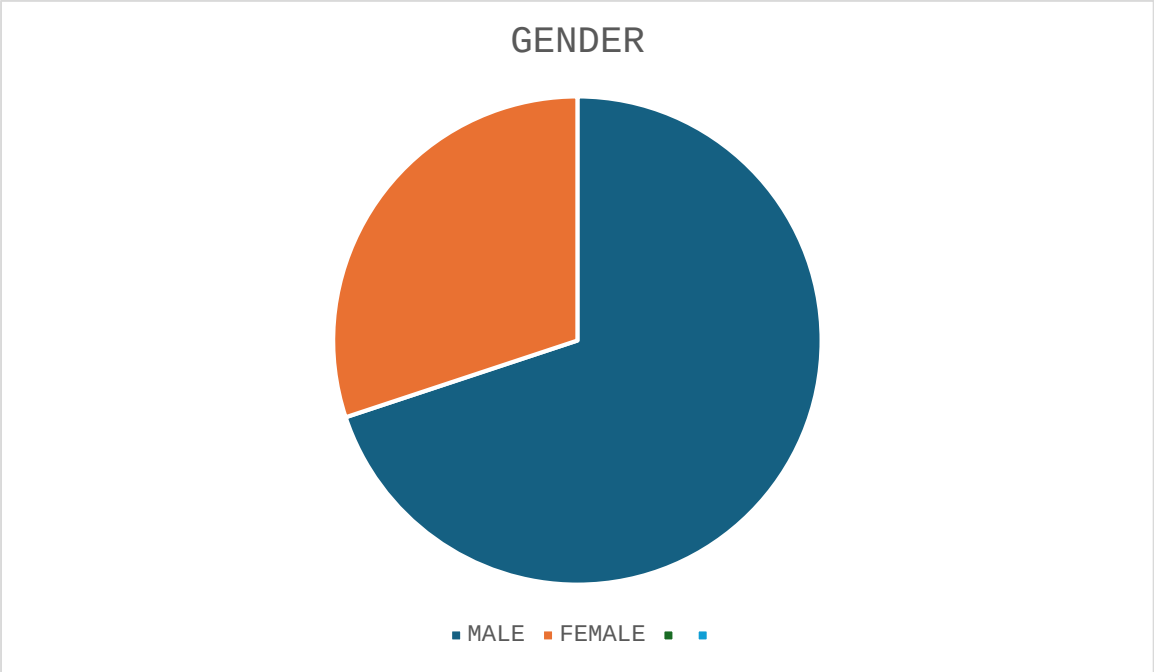

Table 4.2

Distribution of participants based on occupation

	frequency	Percent
Worker	2	1.8
business	4	3.5
Home maker	4	3.5
Professional	30	26.5
Student	64	56.6
None	9	8.0
total	113	100

Figure 2

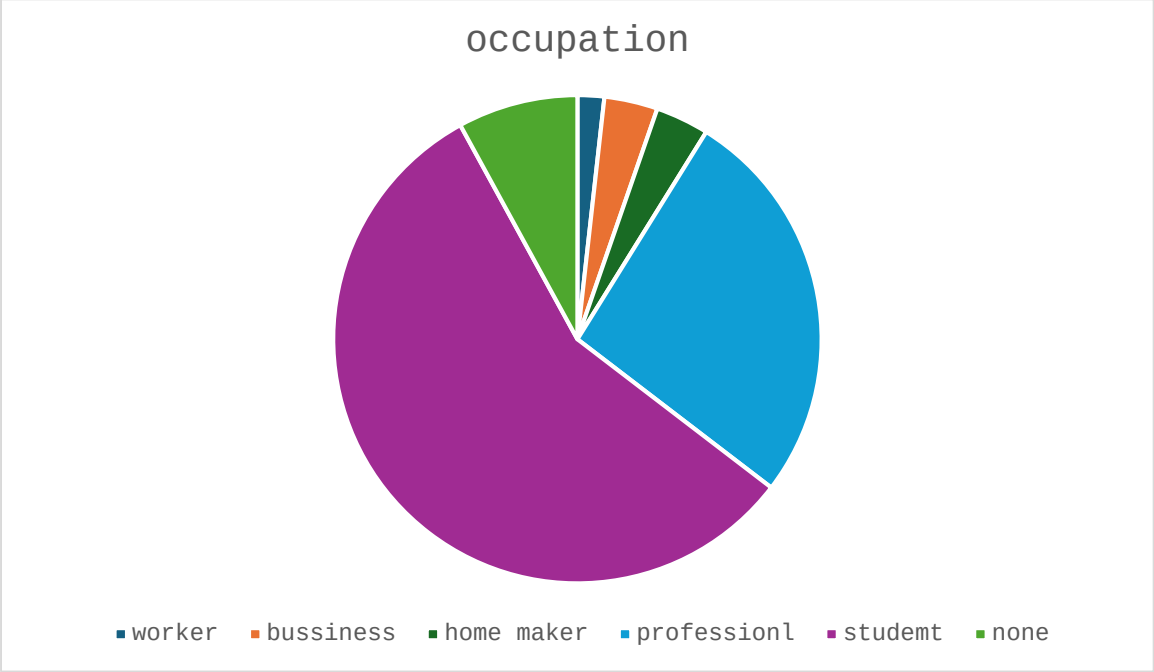

Table 4.2 presents the distribution of participants according to their occupation. Among the total sample (n=113), the majority of the participants were students (n=64, 56.6 %). This was followed by professionals (n=30, 26.5%). A smaller proportion of parcipants reported having no occupation (n=9,8.0%). Additionally 4 participants (3.5%) were involved in business and 4 participants (3.5%) were homemakers. Only 2 participants (1.8%) were workers.

TABLE 4.3

Distribution of participants Based on Educational qualification

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
H.Sc	7	6.2
UG	30	26.2
PG	33	29.2
PROFESSIONAL DEGREE	43	38.1
Total	113	100

Figure 3

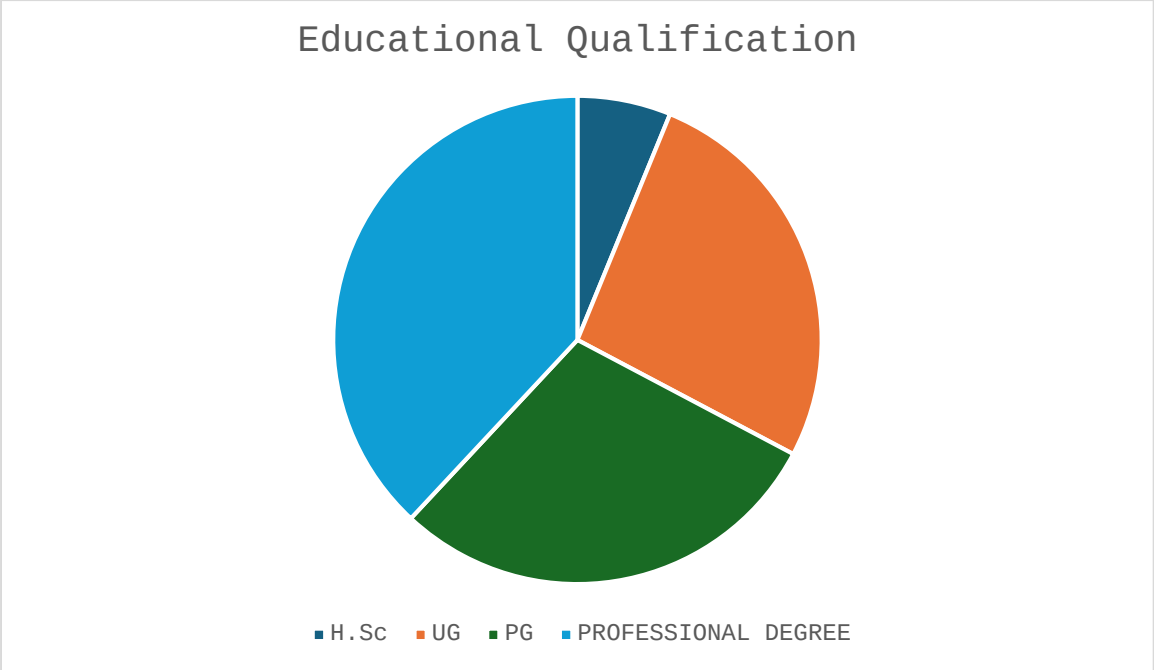

Table 4.3 presents the distribution of participants according to their educational qualification. Out of the total sample (N=113), The majority of them have professional degree (N-43, 38.1%). This was followed by participants with postgraduate (PG) qualification (n=33, 29.2%) and undergraduate (UG) qualification (n=30, 26.5%). A smaller proportion of the participants had completed Higher secondary education (H.sc) (n=7.6.2%).

Table 4.4

Distribution of participants based on marital status

	frequency	Percent
In a relationship	5	4.4
Separated	2	8.0
Married	9	1.8
Single	97	85.8
total	113	100.0

Figure 4

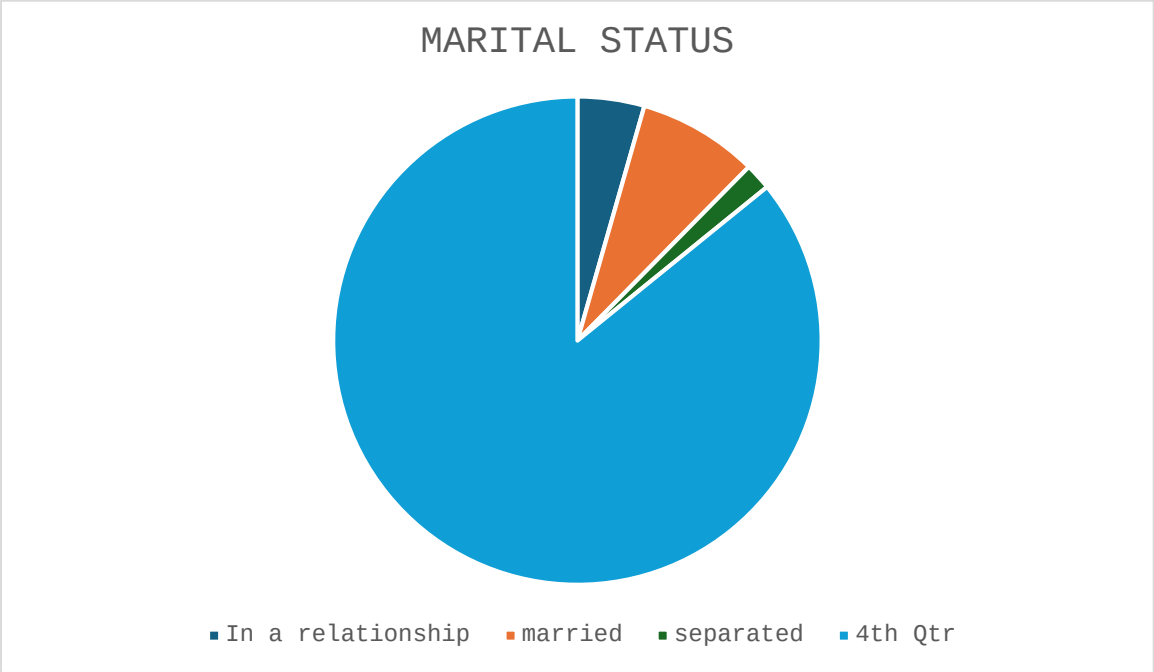

Table 4 presents the distribution of participants according to their marital status.Among the total sample (n=113), the majority of the participants were single (n=97, 85..8%)/ A smaller proportion of the participants were married (n=9, 8.0%), while 5 participants (4.4%) reported being in a relationship. Only 2 participants (1.8%) were separated.

Table 4.5

Distribution of participants based on family type

	frequency	Percent
Alone	2	1.8
Extended	1	9
Joint	20	17.7
Nuclear	90	79.6
	113	100.0

Table 4.5 presents the distribution of participants according to their family type. Among the total sample (N=113), The majority of the participants belonged to nuclear family (n=90, 79.6%). This was followed by participants from joint families (n=20, 17.7%). A very small proportion of participants lined alone (n=2, 1.8%) and belonged to extended families (n=1, 0.9%).

Figure 5

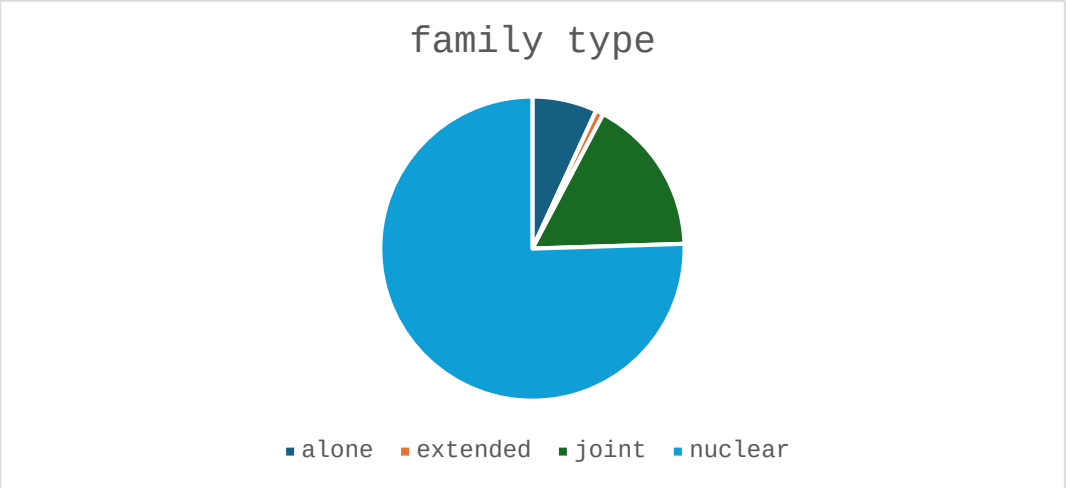

Table 4.6

Distribution of participants based on Area of Residence

	frequency	Percent
Rural	37	32.7
Suburban	15	13.3
Urban	61	54.0
Total	113	100.0

Figure 6

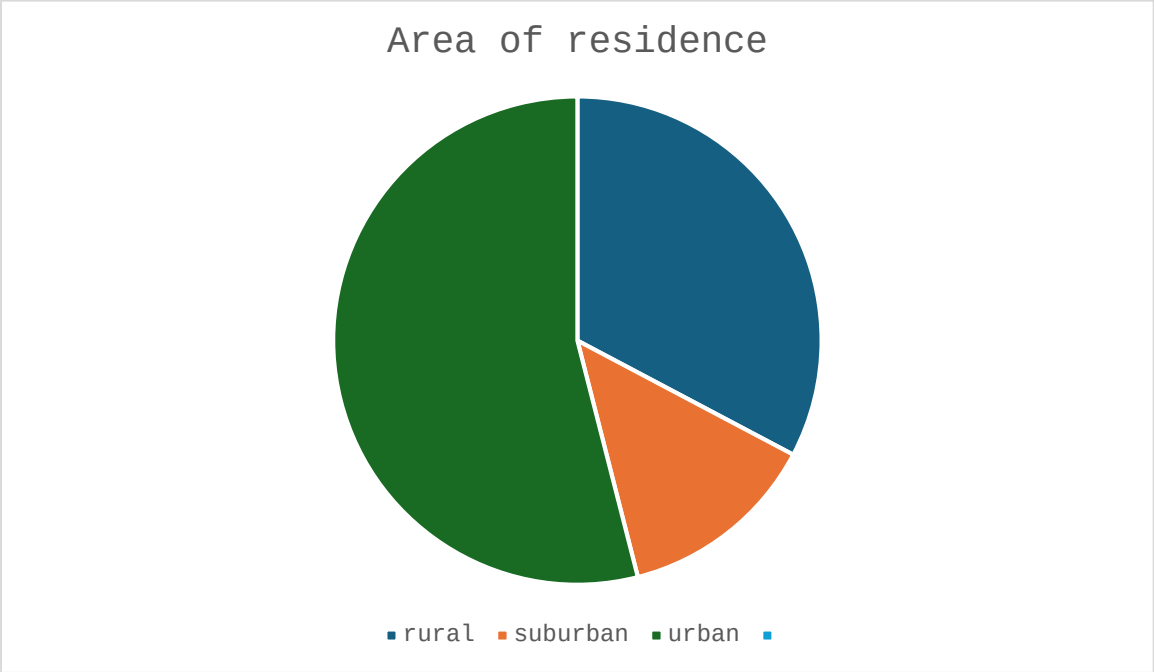

Table 4.6 presents the distribution of participants according to their area of residence. Among the total sample (N=113), More than half of the participants were from urban areas (n=61, 54.0%). This was followed from rural areas (n=37, 32.7%).

Table 4.7

Correlation Between PIUQ Total Score and DASS Score

			DASS TOTAL SCORE	STRESS	ANXIETY	DEPRESSION
PIUQ score	Total	r-value	.538**	.554**	.404**	.535**
		p-value	.0005	.0005	.0005	.0005
		N	113	113	113	113

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.7 presents the results of the Pearson correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between problematic internet use and psychological distress among the participants (N = 113). The analysis explored the association between the total score of the Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire (PIUQ) and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) scores.

The findings reveal a statistically significant positive correlation between PIUQ total score and the overall DASS total score ($r = .538$, $p < .01$). This indicates that participants who reported higher levels of problematic internet use also tended to experience higher levels of psychological distress.

Further analysis showed a significant positive correlation between PIUQ total score and stress ($r = .554$, $p < .01$). Similarly, significant positive relationships were observed between PIUQ total score and anxiety ($r = .404$, $p < .01$), as well as depression ($r = .535$, $p < .01$).

These findings suggest that problematic internet use is positively associated with stress, anxiety, and depression among the participants. In other words, individuals who exhibit higher levels of problematic internet use are more likely to report greater psychological distress.

Table 4.8

Correlation Between PIUQ Obsession and DASS Scores

		DASS TOTAL SCORE	STRESS	ANXIETY	DEPRESSION
Obsession	r-value	.536**	.550**	.436**	.500**
	p-value	.0005	.0005	.0005	.0005
	N	113	113	113	113

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.8 presents the results of the Pearson correlation anaysis examining the relationship between the Obsession dimension of problematic internet use and psychological distress variables measured by the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) among the participants (N = 113).

The results indicate a moderate positive correlation between the obsession dimension and the overall DASS total score (r = .536, p < .01). This suggests that individuals who experience higher levels of obsessive thoughts or preoccupation with internet use are more likely to report higher levels of overall psychological distress.

Further analysis reveals a significant positive relationship between obsession and stress (r = .550, p < .01). This finding indicates that participants who show stronger obsessive tendencies toward internet use also tend to experience greater levels of stress. Similarly, the obsession dimension shows a significant positive correlation with anxiety (r = .436, p < .01) and depression (r = .500, p < .01).

Overall, the findings suggest that obsessive patterns of internet use are significantly associated with increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among the participants.

Table 4.9

Correlation Between PIUQ Neglect and DASS Scores

		DASS TOTAL SCORE	STRESS	ANXIETY	DEPRESSION
Neglect	r-value	.531**	.533**	.396**	.541**
	p-value	.0005	.0005	.0005	.0005
	N	113	113	113	113

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.9 presents the results of the Pearson correlation analysis examining the relationship between the Neglect dimension of problematic internet use and psychological distress variables measured using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) among the participants (N = 113).

The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between neglect and the overall DASS total score (r = .531, p < .01). This indicates that individuals who tend to neglect daily responsibilities or activities due to excessive internet use are more likely to experience higher levels of overall psychological distress.

Further analysis shows that neglect is also positively correlated with stress (r = .533, p < .01), suggesting that participants who display higher levels of neglect related to internet use tend to report greater levels of stress. Similarly, a significant positive relationship was observed between neglect and anxiety (r = .396, p < .01), as well as depression (r = .541, p < .01).

Overall, these findings suggest that neglecting daily activities as a result of problematic internet use is significantly associated with increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among the participants.

Table 4.10

Correlation Between PIUQ Control Disorder and DASS Scores

		DASS TOTAL SCORE	STRESS	ANXIETY	DEPRESSION
Control disorder	r-value	.349**	.374**	.230**	.365**
	p-value	.0005	.0005	.014	.0005
	N	113	113	113	113

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.10 presents the results of the Pearson correlation analysis examining the relationship between the Control Disorder dimension of problematic internet use and psychological distress variables measured using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS) among the participants (N = 113).

The results indicate a significant positive correlation between control disorder and the overall DASS total score ($r = .349$, $p < .01$). This suggests that individuals who experience difficulty controlling their internet use tend to report higher levels of overall psychological distress.

Further analysis shows that control disorder is also positively correlated with stress ($r = .374$, $p < .01$), indicating that participants who struggle to regulate their internet usage are more likely to experience higher levels of stress. Similarly, a significant positive relationship was found between control disorder and depression ($r = .365$, $p < .01$).

In addition, a weaker but statistically significant positive correlation was observed between control disorder and anxiety ($r = .230$, $p < .05$). This suggests that difficulties in controlling internet use may also be associated with higher levels of anxiety, although the relationship is comparatively weaker than those observed with stress and depression.

Overall, these findings indicate that difficulties in controlling internet use are associated with increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among the participants.

Table 4.11

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Age	113	18	30	21.7	1.9
DASS total scores	113	0.0	63.0	24.8	13.3
Stress	113	0.0	21.0	8.4	4.8
Anxiety	113	0.0	21.0	8.4	4.7
Depression	113	0.0	21.0	8.0	4.8

PIUQ Total Score	113	18.0	70.0	46.0	11.5
Obsession	113	6.0	25.0	14.1	4.3
Neglect	113	6.0	25.0	15.4	4.5
Control Disorder	113	6.0	27.0	16.5	4.3

Table 4.11 presents the descriptive statistics of the main study variables, including age, psychological distress variables measured using the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS), and problematic internet use measured using the Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire (PIUQ). The table includes the number of participants (N), minimum and maximum values, mean scores, and standard deviation.

The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 30 years, with a mean age of 21.7 years (SD = 1.9). With regard to psychological distress, the mean DASS total score among the participants was 24.8 (SD = 13.3), with scores ranging from 0 to 63.

The mean score for stress was 8.4 (SD = 4.8), while the mean score for anxiety was 8.4 (SD = 4.7). The mean depression score was 8.0 (SD = 4.8), with scores ranging from 0 to 21 for all three subscales.

In terms of problematic internet use, the mean PIUQ total score was 46.0 (SD = 11.5), with scores ranging from 18 to 70. Among the PIUQ subdimensions, the mean score for obsession was 14.1 (SD = 4.3), while neglect had a mean score of 15.4 (SD = 4.5). The control disorder dimension showed a mean score of 16.5 (SD = 4.3), with scores ranging from 6 to 27.

Overall, these descriptive statistics provide an overview of the distribution and variability of the key variables examined in the study.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between problematic internet use and psychological distress among young adults. With the rapid growth of digital technology and widespread internet accessibility, internet use has become an integral part of everyday life. While the internet provides several benefits, excessive and uncontrolled use may lead to psychological and behavioral problems. In recent years, problematic internet use has attracted increasing attention from researchers due to its potential impact on mental health and well-being.

This study looked at how using the internet in a way is connected to feeling stressed, anxious and depressed. The study use the list of questions called the Problematic Internet questionnaire to see how people use the Internet in a bad way. It also use another list of question called The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale to see how people feel stressed, anxious and depressed. One hundred and thirteen people who were, between eighteen and thirty years old took party in this study.

The findings of the study revealed significant positive relationships between problematic internet use and psychological distress. The results indicated that individuals who reported higher levels of problematic internet use were also more likely to experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. In

addition, the different dimensions of problematic internet use, namely obsession, neglect, and control disorder, were also significantly associated with psychological distress.

The following sections discuss these findings in detail in relation to previous research and theoretical perspectives.

Discussion of Demographic Characteristics

The demographic analysis revealed that most of the participants were female, and most of them were students. This finding may reflect the increasing engagement of young adults, particularly students, with digital technologies and online platforms for academic, social, and entertainment purposes. Young adults are generally considered one of the most active groups of internet users, as they frequently rely on digital devices for communication, learning, and social interaction.

In terms of educational background, most participants had either a professional degree or postgraduate qualification. This indicates that the sample largely consisted of individuals who were engaged in higher education or professional training. The academic environment often requires frequent internet usage for research, assignments, and academic communication, which may increase the overall time spent online.

The majority of participants were single and belonged to nuclear families. These demographic characteristics are commonly observed among young adult populations in academic settings. Being single and living in nuclear families may also influence patterns of internet use, as individuals may spend more time engaging with digital platforms for social interaction and entertainment.

With regard to the area of residence, more than half of the participants were from urban areas. Urban environments generally provide greater access to internet services, digital infrastructure, and technological devices. As a result, individuals living in urban areas may have more opportunities for internet use compared to those living in rural settings.

These demographic characteristics provide important context for understanding the patterns of internet use observed in the present study.

Discussion of Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics provide an overview of the distribution of the key variables examined in the study. The average age of the participants was approximately 21.7 years, indicating that the sample primarily consisted of young adults. This age group is often considered particularly vulnerable to problematic internet use due to their frequent engagement with digital technologies and social media platforms.

The mean score of the PIUQ total score indicated a moderate level of problematic internet use among the participants. This suggests that while internet use is common among young adults, some individuals may exhibit patterns of use that reflect difficulty controlling their internet behavior.

The psychological distress variables measured using the DASS also showed moderate levels across stress, anxiety, and depression. These findings highlight the presence of psychological challenges among young adults, which may be influenced by various academic, social, and personal factors.

Overall, the descriptive statistics provide important insights into the general levels of problematic internet use and psychological distress within the sample population.

Discussion of the Relationship Between Problematic Internet Use and Psychological Distress

One of the primary objectives of this study was to examine the relationship between problematic internet use and psychological distress. The findings of the correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between PIUQ total score and DASS total score.

This result suggests that individuals who engage in higher levels of problematic internet use are more likely to experience greater psychological distress. In other words, excessive or uncontrolled internet use may be associated with increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.

Several explanations may account for this relationship. Excessive internet use may interfere with daily activities, sleep patterns, academic responsibilities, and social interactions. When individuals spend prolonged periods online, they may neglect important responsibilities and face difficulties maintaining a balanced lifestyle. Over time, such patterns may contribute to emotional distress and psychological problems.

Another possible explanation is that individuals who experience stress or emotional difficulties may use the internet as a coping mechanism. Online activities such as social media use, gaming, and streaming may provide temporary distraction or emotional relief. However, reliance on the internet as a coping strategy may gradually lead to problematic usage patterns.

The findings of the present study are consistent with previous research that has reported significant associations between problematic internet use and mental health problems. Several studies have found that excessive internet use is linked with increased levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among young adults.

Discussion of PIUQ Subdimensions

The present study also examined the relationship between the different dimensions of problematic internet use and psychological distress.

Obsession

The results indicated that the obsession dimension of problematic internet use was significantly associated with stress, anxiety, and depression. Obsession refers to persistent thoughts about internet activities and a strong urge to remain connected online. Individuals who experience obsessive thoughts about internet use may find it difficult to concentrate on other tasks or responsibilities.

Such preoccupation with internet activities may contribute to psychological distress by increasing mental fatigue, reducing productivity, and interfering with daily functioning.

Neglect

The neglect dimension was also found to be significantly related to psychological distress. Neglect refers to situations in which individuals ignore or postpone important responsibilities due to excessive internet use.

When individuals neglect academic work, social responsibilities, or personal commitments because of internet use, it may lead to feelings of guilt, stress, and frustration. Over time, such patterns may negatively affect emotional well-being.

Control Disorder

Control disorder refers to the difficulty individuals experience in regulating or limiting their internet use. The findings of the current study indicates that control disorder was positively correlated with stress, anxiety, and depression.

Individuals who struggle to control their internet usage may experience frustration and feelings of loss of control. These experiences may contribute to increased emotional distress and reduced psychological well-being.

Implications of the Study

The findings of the present study have several important implications. First, the results highlight the potential impact of problematic internet use on the mental health of young adults. As internet access continues to expand globally, it becomes increasingly important to understand how digital behaviors may influence psychological well-being.

Second, the findings suggest the need for increased awareness regarding healthy internet usage patterns. Educational institutions and mental health professionals may play an important role in promoting balanced internet use and encouraging healthy coping strategies among young adults.

Third, early identification of problematic internet use may help prevent the development of more severe psychological difficulties. Programs that promote digital well-being and responsible internet use may contribute to improved mental health outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, the present study has many limitations that should be explored further. Firstly, the current study employed a cross-sectional design, which doesn't provide enough evidence to establish a causal relationship on a longitudinal basis.

Second, the data were collected using self-report measures, which may be influenced by response bias or social desirability.

Third, the sample chosen wasn't representative of the general population, limiting the generalizability

of the results.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies may consider using larger and more diverse samples to better understand the relationship between problematic internet use and mental health across different populations. Longitudinal research designs may also help clarify the direction of the relationship between internet use and psychological distress.

Researchers may also explore additional factors such as personality traits, coping strategies, and social support that may influence the relationship between problematic internet use and mental health.

In conclusion, the findings of the present study demonstrate a significant relationship between problematic internet use and psychological distress among young adults. Higher levels of problematic internet use were associated with increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. The subdimensions of problematic internet use, including obsession, neglect, and control disorder, were also significantly related to psychological distress.

These results emphasise on the need to understand the psychological impact of excessive internet use and emphasize the need for promoting healthy digital habits among young adults.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between problematic internet use and psychological distress among young adults. With the increasing integration of digital technology into everyday life, internet usage has become an essential part of communication, learning, entertainment, and social interaction. Although the internet provides many benefits, excessive and uncontrolled use may lead to negative psychological consequences. Therefore, the present study focused on understanding how unhealthy and unregulated internet use impact mental health outcomes and leads to various symptomology among young adults.

The findings of the study revealed a significant positive relationship between problematic internet use and psychological distress. Individuals who reported higher levels of problematic internet use also reported higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. These findings suggest that excessive internet engagement may contribute to emotional difficulties and reduced psychological well-being. As young adults spend increasing amounts of time online, particularly through social media platforms, online gaming, and other digital activities, the potential impact of such behaviors on mental health becomes an important area of concern.

The study also examined the different dimensions of problematic internet use, including obsession, neglect, and control disorder. Each of these dimensions showed significant relationships with psychological distress variables. The obsession dimension reflects the tendency of individuals to become mentally preoccupied with internet use. When individuals constantly think about online activities or feel compelled to remain connected, it may interfere with their ability to concentrate on academic, social, or personal responsibilities. Over time, such patterns may contribute to emotional strain and psychological discomfort.

Similarly, the neglect dimension highlights how excessive internet use may lead individuals to ignore or postpone important daily responsibilities. When individuals begin to prioritize internet activities over academic tasks, social interactions, or self-care, it may result in feelings of guilt, stress, and frustration. Such behavioral patterns can gradually affect emotional stability and increase vulnerability to psychological distress.

The control disorder dimension refers to the difficulty individuals experience in regulating or limiting their internet use. When individuals feel unable to control the amount of time they spend online, it may lead to frustration and a sense of loss of control. This lack of regulation may contribute to increased levels of stress and emotional discomfort. The findings of the present study indicate that difficulties in controlling internet use are significantly associated with psychological distress among young adults.

Overall, the results of the study highlight the important relationship between problematic internet use and mental health outcomes. The findings suggest that excessive internet use may not only affect daily functioning but may also influence emotional well-being. As digital technology continues to play a central role in modern life, understanding the psychological impact of internet usage becomes increasingly important.

The findings of the study also emphasize the importance of promoting healthy digital habits among young adults. Encouraging balanced internet usage, improving time-management skills, and increasing awareness about the psychological effects of excessive internet engagement may help reduce the risk of mental health problems. Educational institutions, mental health professionals, and families may play a crucial role in supporting young individuals in developing healthier digital behaviors.

Implications of the Study

The findings of the present study have several important implications. First, the study highlights the need to increase awareness about the potential psychological consequences of problematic internet use. As internet access becomes more widespread, individuals may not always recognize the negative effects that excessive internet use can have on their mental health. Awareness programs and educational initiatives may help individuals develop a better understanding of healthy internet usage patterns.

Second, the results suggest that mental health professionals and counselors should consider problematic internet use as a potential factor when addressing psychological distress among young adults. Interventions that focus on improving self-regulation, time management, and healthy coping strategies may help reduce excessive internet use and promote better psychological well-being.

Third, educational institutions can play an important role in promoting digital well-being among students. Workshops, awareness campaigns, and counseling services may help students develop balanced technology usage habits and prevent excessive dependence on digital platforms.

Finally, the findings provides us with information that contributes to the growing body of research examining the relationship between digital behaviors and mental health. Understanding these relationships is essential for developing strategies that promote healthy digital engagement while minimizing potential psychological risks.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the important findings of the present study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study used a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to determine causal relationships between problematic internet use and psychological distress. Although the results indicate significant associations, it cannot be concluded that problematic internet use directly causes psychological distress.

Second, the study relied on self-report measures to assess internet use and psychological distress. Self-report data may sometimes be influenced by response bias, social desirability, or inaccurate recall. Participants may underreport or overreport their behaviors and experiences.

Third, the sample consisted mainly of young adults, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other age groups. Internet usage patterns and psychological experiences may vary across different age groups and cultural contexts.

Another limitation is that the study did not examine specific types of internet activities such as social media use, online gaming, or streaming behaviors. Different forms of internet use may have varying psychological impacts, and future research could explore these distinctions in greater detail.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could expand upon the findings of the present study in several ways. First, longitudinal studies could be conducted to examine how problematic internet use and psychological distress develop over time. Such research may provide a better understanding of the causal relationships between these variables.

Second, future studies may include larger and more diverse samples to improve the generalizability of the findings. Including participants from different age groups, cultural backgrounds, and socioeconomic contexts may provide a more comprehensive understanding of problematic internet use.

Researchers may also explore the impact of specific online activities such as social media engagement, online gaming, and digital communication on mental health outcomes. Understanding how different types of internet use influence psychological well-being may help identify specific risk factors.

Finally, future research may investigate protective factors such as coping strategies, social support, emotional regulation, and digital literacy that may help individuals manage their internet usage more effectively.

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