

# The Clinical Facets of Internet Addiction in the Indian Setting – A Critical Appraisal of Case Reports

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## ABSTRACT

The internet use has become a major part of today's lives and research regarding internet addiction (IA) has grown markedly in recent years. Most studies have relied on surveys and the empirical appraisal of the clinical patterns of the condition is still scarce, especially in Indian settings. The present paper briefly outlines five treatment-seeking male subjects aged between 14 and 24 years with different clinical IA profiles undergoing the treatment. Apart from the complaints of problematic internet use, two of the subjects were having psychiatric symptoms such as delusions and clinical depression. All the cases had severe addiction as per Young IA Test scores and reported relief on the continuation of the symptomatic treatment. There are uncertainties about the clinical construct of the term "IA," but evidence suggests that excessive use of the internet is associated with adverse mental health outcomes.

**Key words:** Case report, India, internet addiction

## BACKGROUND

Internet addiction (IA) is currently not a formally recognized disorder and is considered as a condition warranting more clinical research and experience in the diagnostic and statistical manual, fifth edition.<sup>[1]</sup> Many studies have evaluated IA using different questionnaires.<sup>[2]</sup> The prevalence of IA varies depending on the screening instrument and study context. Most of the studies are conducted among school- or college-based cohorts.<sup>[3]</sup> Most studies have relied on surveys and these do not provide much information about the actual experiences of the patient. The present paper provides a clinical outlook of IA as per the available case reports from India.

profiles undergoing the treatment.<sup>[4-6]</sup> All the subjects were male and most of the cases were young adolescents within the age range from 14 to 19 years. Apart from the complaints of problematic internet use, two of the subjects were having psychiatric symptoms such as delusions and clinical depression. Strikingly, all the cases were having severe IA and scored more than 80 as per Young IA Test (Y-IAT) [Table 1]. The subjects reported that they spent around 4–16 h/day on various modes of the internet such as video games and social media applications. Three of the subjects were treated with psychopharmacological interventions and motivational enhancement therapy was used for the remaining two subjects. All the subjects reported a symptomatic relief on the continuation of the treatment.

## CASE SERIES

We outline the five cases of treatment-seeking male subjects aged between 14 and 24 years with different clinical IA

## DISCUSSION

The present case series provides an overview of the clinical description of IA in the Indian setting. The use internet has

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Table 1: Clinical profile of subjects with internet addiction

Characteristics	Case 1 (Ghosh <i>et al.</i> , 2018)	Case 2 (Sharma <i>et al.</i> , 2015)	Case 3 (Sharma <i>et al.</i> , 2015)	Case 4 (Spoorthy <i>et al.</i> , 2017)	Case 5 (Spoorthy <i>et al.</i> , 2017)
Age/gender	26 years/male	15/male	17/male	14/male	19/Male
Occupation	NM	Student	Student	Student	NM
Clinical findings	Decreased sleep and energy Delusion of persecution Delusion of reference.	Sleep disturbances and decreased energy Irregular eating habits Losing academic grades	Aggressive behaviors Losing academic grades, decreased energy Neck pain, fatigue, and eye strain	Sleep disturbances Weight loss Anhedonia Decreased energy and social interaction Depressed mood Suicidal ideations	Aggressive behavior Sleep disturbance Decreased energy Irritability and restlessness
Daily hours spent in electronic gadgets	NM	10–12 h/day	10–14 h/day	4–6 h/day	5–6 h/day
Mode of excessive internet use	Playing online video game (mobile legends)	Playing online video games	Playing online video games	Watching pornography	Chatting in social media applications
Young Internet Addiction Test (Y-IAT) score	Y-IAT score – 80	Y-IAT score – 84	Y-IAT score – 81	Y-IAT score – 85	Y-IAT score – 82
Provisional diagnosis	IAD with polysubstance abuse and F23.0	NM	NM	Problematic internet use and childhood depression	NM
Management	Supportive management (antipsychotics and anti-anxiety agents)	Motivation enhancement therapy	Motivation enhancement therapy (family sessions)	Supportive management (anti-depressants and anti-anxiety agents)	Supportive management (anti-anxiety agents)
Effect of interventions	NO IAD behaviors	Symptomatic relief	Symptomatic relief	NO IAD behaviors and symptomatic improvement after 4 weeks of treatment	Symptomatic relief

NM: Not mentioned, IAD: Internet addiction disorder

become a major part of today's lives and often the public health concerns related to the use of the internet are not well documented. India is considered the second largest nation on internet usage worldwide and our findings support the adverse effects of excessive use of the internet use among adolescents in this setting. It is interesting to note that all reported cases of IA were male in this setting. We found that playing videogames was associated with IA in almost all the subjects and watching pornography was the most preferred type of internet use in one subject. The available reports from the USA, Indonesia, and Turkey also support these findings.<sup>[7-9]</sup> The symptomatology of IA varies as per various contexts. Sleep disturbances and decreased energy were common in all the cases in this setting and two of the subjects were reported clinical psychiatric illnesses such as delusions and affective symptoms along with their problematic internet use. One case report from Brazil reported obsessive-compulsive symptoms and bipolar disorder along with excessive use of internet use in a female adolescent.<sup>[10]</sup> This further highlights that excessive use of the internet has the potential for the development of a mental disorder. Regardless of the varying presentation of symptoms, all the subjects in our case series reported symptomatic relief with the allotted interventions. This corroborates the findings of earlier case reports that IA can be treated with psychosocial and pharmacological interventions.<sup>[11]</sup> It is well known that excessive use of internet use will impair social and occupational functions. This was evident in our findings as to the subjects as a whole reported that their IA altered their social performance. All our subjects were severe addicts as per Y-IAT scores which further emphasize the clinical utility of research scales in understanding this clinical condition.

## CONCLUSION

There are uncertainties about the clinical construct of the term "IA," but the available case reports from India suggest

that excessive use of the internet has the potential for the development of health issues including mental illnesses.

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