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## **Internet Addiction and Emotional (Dys)Regulation Among Adolescents in Chennai**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Adolescence is a permutable period of biological and psychological development. The way adolescents interact, socialise, form, and retain relationships has been drastically altered by the internet, particularly on social media. Living in the digital age has advantages, but it also has its own psychological and emotional challenges. Emotional regulation is the process of initiating, maintaining, or modifying the frequency, intensity, or duration of emotional events. Difficulties in regulating emotions are one of the risk factors for addiction. Reviews suggest that Internet addiction has been linked to issues with emotion regulation. In fact, those who have trouble controlling their emotions may be more susceptible to internet addiction. Therefore, this study aims to understand the relationship between Internet addiction and Emotional (Dys)regulation in adolescence. The study is conducted among 50 participants with 25 male and 25 female students who are between the ages of 12 and 18. The Internet Addiction Test by Kimberly Young (1998) was used to measure the level of internet addiction. The Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale-18 by Sarah E. Victor & E. David Klonsky (2016) was used to measure difficulties in emotional regulation. The results revealed the significant relationship between Internet addiction and emotional regulation among adolescents. The findings of this study will be helpful for psychologists to develop strategies and help adolescents manage their emotions.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Digital age, Addiction, Emotion Regulation, Dysregulation.

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **ADOLESCENCE**

Adolescence is considered as an essential step in person's life for achieving the happiness and success along with the achievement of physical, psychological, social and economic maturity (Gholampour et al., 2013). New Internet-based information and communication technologies, including social media, personal computers, mobile or cellular phones, and other gadgets, have grown significantly over the past ten years and are now widely used (Lu et al., 2011). Most users of these various

technologies are adolescents and young adults (Willoughby, 2008) and the main purpose of use is social interaction and interpersonal communication (Moawad and Ebrahim, 2016) which helps individuals to create new social networks. However, improper or excessive Internet use can lead to Internet addiction (IA) and detrimental effects on one's life (Moreno et al., 2013).

## **INTERNET**

Problematic Internet usage (PIU) is currently one of the addictive behaviours among adolescents. Problematic Internet usage is characterised as spending too much time online and is frequently accompanied by uncontrollable obsession, stress, and desires associated to computers (Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2010) all of which can have a negative impact on one's mental and physical health (Beard & Wolf, 2001).

Within this contemporary research field, several psychopathological factors have been found to be associated with the problematic Internet use, such as social anxiety disorders (Vadher et al., 2019), depression (Musetti, Terrone, & Schimmenti, 2018; Wartberg et al., 2016), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, symptoms of sleep disturbance (Starcevic & Khazaal 2017), dysfunctional parent-adolescent relationship (Chen, Li, Bao, Yan, & Zhou, 2015; D'Arienzo, Boursier, Griffiths, 2019; Schimmenti, Passanisi, Gervasi, Manzella, & Famà, 2014), and problematic behaviors such as alcohol use (Ko et al., 2008).

Numerous studies have looked at how Internet Addiction and personality traits like neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness (Chang et al., 2004), boredom propensity (Chou et al., 2018), borderline personality characteristics (Lu et al., 2017), reinforcement sensitivity (Lu et al., 2019), and frustration intolerance (Lu et al., 2019) relate to one another.

## **EMOTIONAL REGULATION**

According to the individual's goals, emotion management involves either sustaining, amplifying, or inhibiting the emotion (Gross, 1998, 2002; Gross and Thompson, 2007). Emotion regulation describes the mechanisms influencing the feelings people experience, when they experience them, how they experience them, and how they express them (Gross, 1998, 2008; Rottenberg and Gross, 2003).

Macklem (2008) underlines the link between emotional dysregulation and addictions. According to Gross (2007), among emotion control techniques, suppression is not just restricted to feelings; it can also be a coping mechanism for addictions. By stifling their own thoughts, addicts try to restrain their cravings. Hormes, Kearns, and Timko (2014) found in their study that people with high degrees of Internet addiction had trouble controlling their emotions. According to Caplan's (2010) study, there is a bad correlation between effective emotion control and Internet addiction. As a result, the focus of this study is on how Internet addiction affects the emotional (Dys)regulation of adolescents in Chennai.

### **THEORIES RELATED TO INTERNET ADDICTION AND EMOTION REGULATION**

The **Uses and Gratifications theory** (U&G theory), developed by Elihu Katz in 1959, serves as the theoretical foundation for understanding internet addiction. The results of media use, according to Katz (1959), depend on the motivations behind and methods employed by the user. As a result, the two key elements of the U&G theory are the media's decision to engage and the satisfaction they derive from it (Ruggiero, 2000). This theory is put into practise by the social and psychological needs of people, which create motives and expectations for mass media (Katz, 1959). According to Newhagen and Rafaeli (1996), the internet, whether used for information seeking, interpersonal communication, entertainment, or escapism, has something to offer everyone.

**Cognitive-Behavioral Theory:** According to a number of researchers, Obsessive Internet use offers ultimately dysfunctional and ineffective ways to control negative emotions related to cognitions connected to poor self-esteem and self-critical thoughts. The short-term emotional relief and diversion are counterbalanced by longer-term negative effects, such as deteriorating relationships and subpar academic or professional performance.

According to the **Social Skills Deficit Theory**, which is summarised by Shaw and Black, people with poor social skills who may also be socially anxious are drawn to the anonymity of the Internet and the opportunities it provides for building relationships in less risky circumstances than those occurring face-to-face. Individuals also have more control over how they show themselves and can create more favourable impressions of potential admirers. While this aspect of Internet-mediated

contact may aid those who are socially awkward or sad in overcoming their inhibitions, it may also contribute to an avoidance of actual closeness.

According to **Gross's Process of Emotional Regulation**, the dynamics of the emotional process in which regulation may take place are related to five families: Situation Selection, Situation Alteration, Attention Deployment, Cognitive Change, and Response Modulation. Due to the fact that the first four families of methods are used prior to the emotional response, they are referred to be antecedent-focused strategies (Gross, 2002; Ochsner and Gross, 2008, 2014). Since it is utilised after the emotional response has been triggered, the fifth family is response-focused. Additionally, compared to response-focused techniques, antecedent-focused ones are said to be more effective because they alter the emotion itself (that change the emotional reaction produced after the emotion has already been experienced).

## **NEED FOR THE STUDY**

According to the 2011 census around one-fourth of the Indian population is adolescent 253 million (UNICEF, 2011). Adolescence is a momentous phase in which the developmental changes occurring in various aspects. In this mutable period, particularly in late adolescence, individuals are exposed to multiple stressors, which may lead to complex turmoil. One's emotional regulations have potential contribution in handling these challenges effectively. This crucial stage of life, can increase their vulnerability to ineluctably engage in addictive practices and risky behaviours as means of coping strategies. In this era, addiction to internet is of alarming concern and has multifaceted pernicious effects. Reviews suggest that excessive internet usage has difficulty in regulating emotions. As per the statistics in 2016, a global survey by Internet Live Stats an independent agency, found that, internet penetration in India to be 34.8%, meaning 34.8% Indians were active users of internet with yearly user growth of around 15-20% and it also revealed that, India ranked 2nd on total number of users in the world by sharing 13.5% of world internet use. India has large adolescent student population and this population is the one which is most active on internet as per different statistics and studies. As per the National Mental Health Survey of India (2015–2016), the prevalence of psychiatric disorders among adolescents (13–17 years) is reported around 7.3%. Yet, very little attention has been paid to the mental health issues of this age group. Those with excessive internet

usage had high scores on anxiety, depression thus indicating relationship between internet addiction and psychopathology (Goel,2013). However, there are very few studies on how addiction to internet is associated with Emotion (Dys)regulation. The research gap is also prominent in India, especially in the Chennai city. Hence, finding the relationship between Internet Addiction and Emotion (Dys)regulation, can help people to incorporate suitable ways of handling stressors thus improving psychological wellbeing by facilitating healthy and optimal functioning.

### **RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

In the last few decades, not just in India but all over the world, the use of the internet has increased dramatically. Some people use the internet for study, information searching, social networking, and business. However, some people use it for pornography, excessive gaming, all-night chats, and even gambling, which has a significant negative influence on their psychological, social, academic, or professional lives. This study sought to investigate the connection between Internet addiction and Emotional (Dys)regulation in adolescents due to the rising popularity of the Internet in India, particularly among young people, and the paucity of research on the relationship between Internet Addiction and Emotional (Dys)regulation among adolescents.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**Azizi et al (2022)** conducted a study on Relationship between Internet Addiction and Obesity and the Predictive Role of Emotion Dysregulation. The study examined whether Internet addiction significantly predicts obesity and whether Internet addiction and obesity are significantly predicted by emotion dysregulation. School-attending 367 adolescents in Tekab were the participants of the study. The results indicated that Internet addiction significantly predicted obesity, while they both were significantly predicted by emotion dysregulations.

**Gioia et al (2021)** reviewed on Problematic Internet Use and Emotional Dysregulation Among Young People. This review included studies published between 2010 and 2020 that were indexed in major databases with the following keywords: emotion regulation, problematic Internet use, Internet addiction, social network addiction, and social media addiction. In the selection process of the

studies, close attention was paid for the mean age of the involved samples that had to range between 13 and 25 years. Overall, the present review showed that problematic Internet use might represent a coping strategy to compensate for emotional regulation deficits.

**Quaglieri et al(2021)** conducted a study titled From Emotional (Dys)Regulation to Internet Addiction: A Mediation Model of Problematic Social Media Use among Italian Young Adults. The study examined the link between Internet Addiction and variables related to problematic social media use with emotional (Dys)regulation and personality traits. A total of 397 participants, aged 18–35 years were included in the study. The result indicated that Internet Addiction has significant relationship with the investigated variables and also highlighted the crucial role played by emotional (dys)regulation in the fear of missing out and problematic use of social networks.

**Karaer & Akdemir (2019)** conducted a study on Parenting styles, perceived social support and emotion regulation in adolescents with internet addiction. A total of 176 adolescents between the age group of 12 and 17 were included in this study. The results revealed that the parents of adolescents with Internet Addiction were more frequently inadequate in acceptance/involvement, supervision/monitoring and they had less emotional availability. The adolescents with IA had less perceived social support, greater difficulty in the identification and verbal expression of their feelings and emotion regulation.

**Amendola et al (2018)** conducted a study on the relationship between difficulties in emotion regulation and dysfunctional technology use among adolescents. The study investigated gender differences in problematic new technologies use as well as to examine the relationship between problematic new technologies use, emotional regulation and its specific dimensions. The participants of the study were 280 Italian adolescents between the ages 11 and 18 years. Findings of this study indicated a link between problematic new technologies use, emotion dysregulation and its specific dimensions.

**Akbari (2017)** conducted a study on Metacognitions or distress intolerance: The mediating role in the relationship between emotional dysregulation and problematic internet use. A total of 413

undergraduate students from the University of Tehran, Iran were the participants of the study. The results of this study provide evidence for the impact of emotional dysregulation on Problematic Internet Use through metacognitions and distress intolerance. Also, these findings emphasize that distress intolerance has a more significant mediating role than metacognition in the relationship between emotional dysregulation and PIU.

**Ercengiz & Sar (2017)** investigated on the role to predict the internet addiction of emotion regulation in 426 adolescents aged between 13 and 19. The participants were from different high schools in Agra, among which 197 were females and 229 were males. The results found that 34% of internet addiction in adolescents was explained by internet addiction, external functional emotion regulation, external non-functional emotion regulation and internal non-functional emotion regulation were related to internet dependency positively and the internal functional emotion regulation was related to internet dependency negatively.

**Spada & Marino (2017)** investigated on the metacognitions and emotional regulation as predictors of Problematic Internet Use (PIU) among adolescents. A total of 380 students from a secondary school in Italy voluntarily participated in the study and completed online self-report scales assessing PIU, metacognitions and emotional regulation. The findings showed that, metacognitions with the exception of cognitive self-consciousness, were positively correlated with PIU and emotion regulation negatively correlated with PIU. The structural equation modelling also revealed that metacognitions had a direct positive effect on PIU and emotion regulation had a direct negative on PIU, with the relationships between metacognitions and emotion regulation not being significant.

**Yildiz (2017)** conducted a study on Emotion regulation strategies as predictors of internet addiction and smartphone addiction in adolescents. The study sample included 262 high school students with 132 females and 130 males between the age group of 14 and 19. The result suggests that emotion regulation significantly predicted both the Internet addiction and the smartphone addiction.



## METHODOLOGY

**AIM:** The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between gender, Internet Addiction and Emotional (Dys)regulation among adolescents.

### RESEARCH PROBLEM:

1. Whether Gender would have an impact on Internet Addiction and Emotional (Dys)regulation among adolescents.
2. Whether Internet Addiction would have an impact on Emotional (Dys)regulation among adolescents?

### HYPOTHESES:

Based on comprehensive review of literature, the following hypotheses have been formulated.

Hypothesis 1: There will be no significant difference between the gender, Internet Addiction and Emotional (Dys)regulation among adolescents.

Hypothesis 2: Internet addiction would have a significant impact on Emotional (Dys)regulation among adolescents.

### VARIABLES:

- Independent variable – Internet Addiction
- Dependent variable – Emotional (Dys)regulation

### OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF THE VARIABLES USED:

**Internet Addiction:** IA is generally defined as a maladaptive preoccupation with Internet use that interferes with everyday life. Such behavior frequently accompanies a set of clinical symptoms similar to substance use disorders, like mood modification, salience, impaired tolerance, social withdrawal, and conflict (Griffith, 2005)

**Emotional (Dys)regulation:** Emotional dysregulation is a complex collection of processes that are thought to include the following four main aspects (Gratz & Roemer, 2004):



- A lack of awareness, understanding, and acceptance of emotions.
- A lack of adaptive strategies for regulating emotions (the intensity and/or duration).
- An unwillingness to experience emotional distress whilst pursuing desired goals.
- An inability to engage in goal-directed behaviors when experiencing distress.

### **RESEARCH DESIGN:**

A Quantitative research design is utilized for the present study.

### **SAMPLING TECHNIQUE:**

This quantitative study was conducted among adolescents in Chennai between ages of 12 and 18. The study consists of 50 respondents by using the Convenience sampling method.

### **SAMPLE DESCRIPTION:**

The sample size of n=50 (25 Male and 25 Female)

### **TOOLS USED:**

Internet Addiction Test - Kimberly Young (1998) and Difficulty in Emotional Regulation-18 by Sarah E. Victor & E. David Klonsky (2016)

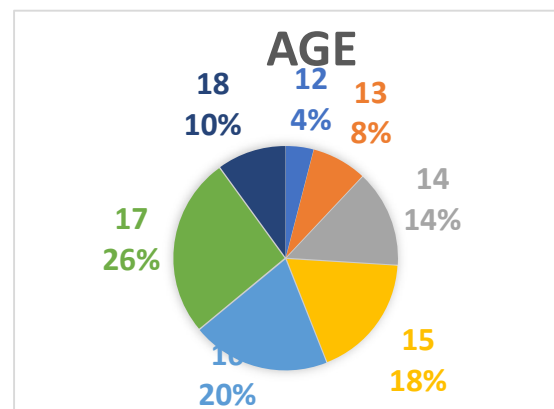
### **RESULTS:**

#### **SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS OF THE RESPONDENTS:**

##### 1. Age of the respondents:

Figure 1 : Age of the respondents

It is found from the Figure 1 that 26 percent of the respondents were in the age group of 17 and 20 percent of respondents were in the age group of 16, 18 percent of respondents were in the age group 15, 14 percent of respondents were in the age group of 14 and 10 percent



of respondents were in the age group of 18, 8 percent of the respondents were in the age group of 13 and 4 percent of respondents were in the age group of 12.

It is concluded that majority of the respondents (26%) belong to the age group of 17 years.

## 2. Gender of the respondents:

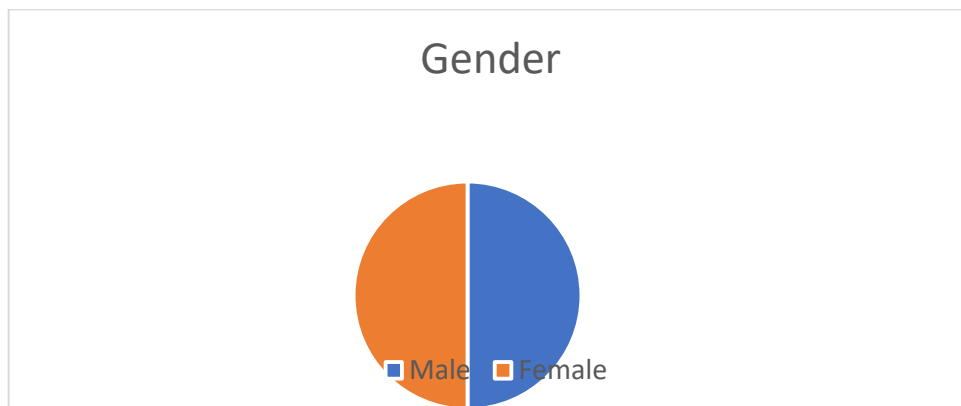
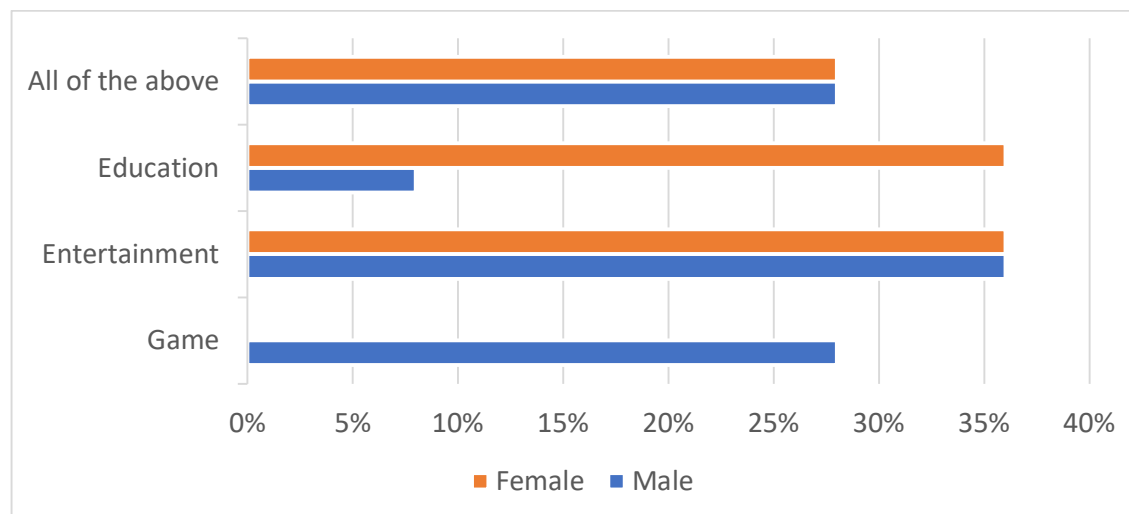


Figure 2 : Gender of the respondents

It is found from the Figure 2 that 50 percent of the respondents were male and 50 percent of the respondents were female.

## 3. Gender Differences in Purpose of using the Internet



Based on the Figure 3, it can be concluded that 28 percent of the male uses Internet for gaming purpose, 36 percent of the male and 36 percent of the female uses Internet for Gaming Purpose, 8 percent of the male and 26 percent of the female uses Internet for Education purpose and 26 percent of both the male and female uses the internet for all the purposes.

**Table I** shows the Descriptive Statistics of Internet Addiction with Emotional (Dys)Regulation.

	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	N
<b>IA</b>	56.1	18.65	50
<b>TOTAL ED</b>	55.16	10.52	50

IA – Internet Addiction

ED- Emotional (Dys)regulation

From the Table I In Internet Addiction, the mean and the standard deviation scores were 56.1 and 18.65 respectively. In Emotional (Dys)regulation, the mean and the standard deviation scores were 55.2 and 10.52 respectively.

Table II shows the Gender differences in Internet Addiction

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	33.667 <sup>a</sup>	32	.387
Likelihood Ratio	46.088	32	.051
N of Valid Cases	50		

From the Table II, it indicates that  $P > 0.05$ , therefore null hypothesis is accepted. Hence there is no significant relationship between Gender and Internet Addiction.

**Table III** shows the gender differences in Emotional (Dys)regulation among adolescents.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	31.905 <sup>a</sup>	26	.196
Likelihood Ratio	42.439	26	.022
N of Valid Cases	50		

From the Table III, it indicates that  $P > 0.05$ , therefore null hypothesis is accepted. Hence there is no significant relationship between Gender and Emotional (Dys)Regulation.

**Table IV** shows the correlation between Internet Addiction and Emotional (Dys)regulation among adolescents.

	Internet Addiction	Emotional (Dys)regulation
Internet Addiction		
Pearson Correlation	1	.794**
Sig (2-tailed)		0.000
N	50	50
Emotional (Dys)regulation		
Pearson Correlation	.794**	1
Sig (2-tailed)	0.000	
N	50	50

From the Table IV, it can be concluded that Internet Addiction has a significant positive correlation with Emotional (Dys)regulation.

## DISCUSSION:

From the Table I, In Internet Addiction, the mean and the standard deviation scores were 56.1 and

18.65 respectively. In Emotional (Dys)regulation, the mean and the standard deviation scores were 55.2 and 10.52 respectively.

The hypothesis of the present study were:

Hypothesis 1: “There will be no significant difference between the gender, Internet Addiction and Emotional (Dys)regulation among adolescents. After conducting the study, this hypothesis has been accepted as result P value is greater than 0.05 which is not significant at 0.05 level. (Table I and Table II)

Hypothesis 2: “Internet Addiction would have significant impact on emotional (Dys)regulation among adolescents”. After conducting the study this hypothesis has been accepted as result showing .794 correlation coefficient which is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed) (Table III). These results have shown strong positive relation between the Internet Addiction and Emotional (Dys)regulation among adolescents.

According to the findings of the current study, adolescents' addiction may be growing as a result of their inability to control their emotions in the face of ongoing stress. Teenagers who are addicted to the Internet may use their smartphones and the Internet more frequently as a coping mechanism for their unpleasant emotions. Elhai et al. (2016) claim that persons with problematic smartphone use are likely utilising their devices excessively due to insufficient emotion management. Furthermore, they stress that problematic smartphone use may, although being unproductive, be a coping mechanism for managing negative emotions. According to this justification, people with high degrees of smartphone and Internet addiction may become addicted to these things in particular because they are unable to control their unpleasant feelings.

## IMPLICATIONS

- The findings of this study indicate a significant and positive relationship between adolescent's Internet Addiction and Emotional (Dys)regulation.
- To enable the findings to be generalised, additional research might examine the relationships between the variables among a varied sample of adolescents.

- In order to conceptualise ideas more fully and effectively, qualitative data may also be collected.
- Adolescents who have a high level of internet addiction and others who are experiencing emotional problems can benefit from exposure to the right psychotherapies and interventions.
- For less disparities, responses from parents, caregivers, or peers can be added in addition to participants' perceptions of internet addiction.

### **LIMITATIONS**

- The present study has been limited to Chennai city only and it has not focused entire district.
- Inability to carry out the study on larger population due to time constraints. The future research can be undertaken covering entire district with larger samples.
- Besides, the impact of Internet Addiction with Emotional (Dys)regulation other variables could also be considered in order to understand the impact of internet addiction.

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