



Exploring The Relationship Of Internet Addiction, Emotional Intelligence And Psychological Wellbeing Among Hostel Students

¹Ananya Chattopadhyay, ²Dr. Ram Prasad Sonkar

¹ PG Student in Psychology, Vasant Kanya Mahavidyalya, B.H.U, Kamachha, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh- 221010,

² Associate Professor, Vasant Kanya Mahavidyalya, B.H.U, Kamachha, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh- 221010

¹ Department of Psychology,

¹ Vasant Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India

Abstract: The growing reliance on excessive internet usage among young adults has raised concerns about internet addiction and its psychological implications, especially among students residing in hostels. They lack proper supervision, suffer from loneliness, feel homesick and use Internet as a means of negative coping strategy. Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Well-Being acts as a protective barrier against Internet Addiction. This study aims to explore and understand these three variables, i.e., Internet Addiction, Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Well-being among hostel students. It also aims to investigate the gender difference that may exist among the hostel students in the context of these three variables. The data was collected from a sample of 150 hostel students (75 males and 75 females) residing in Varanasi, using Young's Internet Addiction Test, Schutte's Emotional Intelligence Scale and Ryff's Psychological Well-being Scale. The results revealed that males had significantly higher internet addiction levels, while females scored higher in emotional intelligence. However, no significant gender differences were found in psychological well-being. The result also indicated a negative correlation between Internet Addiction and Emotional Intelligence along with Psychological Well-being among hostel students. However, the result also revealed a positive co-relation between Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Well-being among hostel students. This study helps in better understanding of hostel students in the context of these three variables and plan interventions accordingly. This study also provides valuable insights for future studies in similar context.

Keywords - Internet Addiction, Emotional Intelligence, Psychological Well-Being, Hostel students

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, internet addiction has emerged as a growing psychological concern, particularly among young adults who are increasingly immersed in a digitalized world. As the internet has become an indispensable tool for communication, education, and entertainment, young adults often find themselves spending extensive hours online. The prevalence of internet addiction among young adults ranges from about 6% to 15% with hostellers often being highly susceptible due to lack of immediate parental supervision and unstructured time (Kuss and Griffiths, 2012). This excessive use can lead to compulsive behaviours and a dependency known as internet addiction. The impact of internet addiction extends beyond mere overuse, often leading to adverse effects on mental health, social relationships, and academic or work performance.

Internet Addiction can be described as a condition where an individual typically cannot control his/her internet usage and continues excessive usage of internet unless they experience negative effect of internet usage on their lives. It is characterized by internet preoccupation, longer usage of internet, inability to control Internet usage and staying online longer than originally intended to. These are often accompanied with risking loss in different areas of life due to internet, lying to conceal the involvement with Internet and using Internet as a way to escape from problems or dysphoric mood. Dr. Kimberly Young, who was a pioneer in the field of internet

addiction research, tried to define it as “an impulse-control disorder that does not involve an intoxicant,” noting that, like other forms of addiction, internet addiction involves compulsive behaviour that interferes with daily life. Her work laid the foundation for understanding internet addiction as a behavioural addiction characterized by a pattern of excessive or obsessive internet use resulting in significant distress or impairment. Internet Addiction can have prolonged negative consequences on the individual’s psychological wellbeing, physiological health, social relationships, occupational functioning and overall functioning. Some of these consequences includes depression and anxiety, sleep disorders, financial strain, cyberbullying and online harassment, body dysmorphia and eating disorders, substance abuse, attention and concentration issues, Carpel Tunnel Syndrome and poor academic performances.

Young Adults, especially hostellers, are the ones who are most vulnerable to developing Internet Addiction due to academic pressures, social challenges and pervasive use of technology. Hostel environments can induce challenging situations such as homesickness and peer influence, which may influence an individual to use excessive internet. Hostel students with higher levels of internet addiction reported feelings of loneliness and lower life satisfaction as compared to day-scholars (Sharma et.al., 2020). This emotional distress leads to excessive internet use, thereby, degrading their psychological wellbeing. Internet addiction also takes a physical toll on the life of the hostel students resulting in chronic health conditions such as obesity, vision problems, sleep disorders, etc.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) have emerged as two critical constructs in understanding and addressing internet addiction. **Emotional Intelligence (EI)** can be defined as a collection of social and emotional skills which affects the way we perceive and ourselves, build and preserve social relationships and make meaningful and efficient use of emotional information. Emotional Intelligence can be defined as a scientific study, mainly focused on being aware of oneself and able to manage one’s own emotions, being socially aware and ability to manage interpersonal relationships with the help of emotions. Broadly speaking, emotional intelligence can be viewed as having five components or elements (Daniel Goleman, 1998). The components include:

1. **Self- Awareness:** It refers to the potential of an individual to identify and understand one’s own emotions.
2. **Self-Regulation:** It refers to the ability of an individual to effectively manage one’s emotions and impulses. It involves controlling potentially disruptive emotions, refraining from impulsive actions and adapting to changing circumstances.
3. **Motivation:** It is the intrinsic drive to pursue goals for personal fulfilment rather than external rewards.
4. **Empathy:** It refers to the ability of an individual to understand and share the feelings of others. It refers to recognizing other’s emotions on an intimate level and feeling and considering from their perspective.
5. **Social Skills:** It refers to managing interpersonal relationships to get along with others. It involves a wide range of interpersonal skills such as communication, conflict resolution, teamwork, etc. These skills facilitate successful navigation of social situations by helping individuals to socially interact with one another.

Emotional Intelligence plays an important role in managing emotions, forming interpersonal as well as intrapersonal relationships and fostering resilience, thereby, enhancing psychological well-being of an individual.

Psychological wellbeing (PWB) is the state of optimal mental functioning and health. It is an individual’s subjective experience of positive psychological states like pleasure, life fulfilment and a sense of purpose and the absence of negative psychological states like depression or anxiety. In simple terms, it can be said that psychological well-being is all about feeling good, which includes positive emotions such as happiness and contentment, and functioning to the optimum level, which includes a sense of purpose, increasing one’s own potential and experiencing positive interpersonal relationships. Factors such as genetic predispositions, personality traits, social supports, marital status, cultural norms, economic stability and access to resources influences psychological wellbeing of an individual.

Psychological well-being has the following important components:

- **Life Satisfaction:** It refers to the cognitive and affective evaluation of an individual’s quality of life and the extent to which they feel their life to be meaningful and rich.
- **Positive emotions:** Positive affirmative emotions like excitement, joy, contentment, etc promotes sense of fulfilment and happiness and act as a protective barrier against negative emotions, thereby improving wellbeing of an individual.
- **Less Negative Emotions:** Experiencing less negative emotions such as anxiety, despair, rage, etc can help improving and maintaining psychological wellbeing of an individual.

- **Autonomy:** Autonomy is the ability of an individual to take important life decisions independently and regulate behaviour according to their personal values and beliefs.
- **Positive Relationships:** Strong interpersonal relationships with loved ones, friends and romantic interests provide immense emotional support and a sense of belonging which promotes psychological wellbeing of an individual.
- **Purpose in Life:** It provides individuals with a sense of purpose or direction, meaning and motivation to move forward. It enhances resilience and promotes contentment and satisfaction, thereby, improving the psychological wellbeing of an individual.
- **Personal Growth:** It reflects a desire to learn and improve as it focuses on the continuous need for development of an individual's abilities and potentials.
- **Environmental Mastery:** Environmental Mastery is the capability of an individual to effectively manage their environment or surroundings with the resources available to them to fulfil their life's demands and necessities.

These components are interconnected and together gives a sense of general fulfilment, happiness and wellbeing to an individual. It has numerous benefits, including acts as a protective cover against stress, enhances life satisfaction, promotes positive mental health, enhances quality of life and improves physical health of an individual.

Young Adults, especially hostellers, are the ones who are most vulnerable to developing Internet Addiction due to academic pressures, social challenges and pervasive use of technology. Hostel environments can induce challenging situations such as homesickness and peer influence, which may influence an individual to use excessive internet. This emotional distress leads to excessive internet use, thereby, degrading their psychological wellbeing. Internet addiction also takes a physical toll on the life of the hostel students resulting in chronic health conditions such as obesity, vision problems, sleep disorders, etc.

II. RATIONALE

Review of literature on Internet Addiction reveals that the increased usage of internet among young adults is a growing concern worldwide. Internet addiction affects their emotional intelligence and psychological wellbeing. Internet addiction takes a special toll on the hostel students as they stay away from their home and internet remains the main source of entertainment for them. Emotional Intelligence acts as a protective barrier against Internet Addiction and safeguards by developing self- control, increase resilience, enhance emotional regulation and also helps build meaningful relationships. Therefore, Internet addiction has found to have a negative relationship with Emotional Intelligence (Ahmed et al.,2024). Psychological wellbeing was also found to be significantly negatively correlated to Internet Addiction (Sharma & Sharma, 2018), as it diminishes an individual's sense of autonomy, disrupts the ability to manage daily responsibilities, stagnates personal growth, strain positive relationships, leads to a loss of purpose in life and reduces self-acceptance. However, emotional intelligence has been positively correlated with psychological wellbeing (Shaheen & Shaheen, 2016).

With increasing use of internet among young adults, the results of this study aim to provide valuable insight on the effect of internet addiction among hostel students. It is important to study and explore the three variables, i.e., internet addiction, emotional intelligence and psychological wellbeing, together to understand its effects, especially on Indian hostel students. In conclusion, this research aims to respond to the gaps in the current literature. The findings from this study will help explore the effect of internet addiction among hostel students as there is a lack of significant research on the topic, as is evident from the literature review. Findings from the study will also help gain better insight in order to handle the issue in a better way by understand the relationship between the variables and its effects on the hostel students. In addition, this study also aims to make promiscuous contribution within the Indian cultural context and provide practical implications considering Indian hostel students and internet addiction.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the gender difference on Internet Addiction, Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Well-being
- To investigate the correlation between internet addiction and emotional intelligence
- To investigate the correlation between internet addiction and psychological well-being
- To investigate the correlation between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being.

IV. HYPOTHESIS

The following research hypotheses have been formulated for the present study:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): There exists a significant gender difference in internet addiction among hostel students

Hypothesis 2 (H2): There exists a significant gender difference in emotional intelligence among hostel students

Hypothesis 3 (H3): There exists a significant gender difference in psychological well-being among hostel students

Hypothesis 4 (H4): There will be a negative correlation between internet addiction and emotional intelligence among hostel students

Hypothesis 5 (H5): There will be a negative correlation between internet addiction and psychological well-being among hostel students

Hypothesis 6 (H6): There will be a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being among hostel students

V. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Sample

The sample consisted of 150 hostel students between the age ranges of 18 – 25 years. The demographic composition included 75 male hostel students and 75 female hostel students of Varanasi. Purposive sampling techniques were used. All the participants of the study use internet on a daily basis. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were considered.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Students residing in hostels in Varanasi
- Students who use internet regularly
- Students aged 18 to 25 years

Exclusion Criteria:

- Day scholars or residential students
- Students who do not use internet regularly
- Presence of medical, psychosocial or emotional conditions of the students

5.2. Procedure

For the purpose of the study, scales to be used are decided and after that study was conducted. Hostel students are approached for the purpose of data collection. Informed consent was acquired from the participants before data was collected from them. It was ensured to the participants that their responses will be kept confidential and will only be used for research purposes. Afterwards, the collected data was used to analyze and interpret with the help of SPSS.

5.3. Measures

• Internet Addiction Test

This scale was developed by Kimberly Young (1998), it is a 20 item self-report questionnaire that measures problematic internet use or “Internet Addiction”. It is a 6-point scale ranging from 0, i.e., “Not Applicable” to 5, i.e., “Always” and the score can range from 0 to 100. Total scores that range from 0 to 30 points are considered to reflect a normal level of Internet usage; scores of 31 to 49 indicate the presence of a mild level of Internet addiction; 50 to 79 reflect the presence of a moderate level; and scores of 80 to 100 indicate a severe dependence upon the Internet. Reliability coefficient Cronbach alpha was calculated as 0.90 and Spearman Brown value was calculated as 0.86.

• Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Scale

It is a 33 item self-report measure of emotional intelligence scale and developed by Nicola Schutte and colleagues (1998). It has four sub-scales: emotion perception, utilizing emotions, managing self-relevant emotions, and managing others’ emotions. It is a 5-point rating scale, ranging from 1 for “strongly agree” to 5 for “strongly disagree”. It also has 3 items (items 5, 28 and 33) which are scored in a reverse scale. The score ranges from 33 to 165. The mean score across many large samples is about 124, with a standard deviation of about 13. Therefore, scores below 111 or above 137 are unusually low or high. The reliability of this scale was 0.90.

• Ryff’s Psychological Well-being Scale- 18

This Scale was developed by Ryff and Keyes in 1995. The scale consists of 18 items scale to measure psychological well-being of an individual and has 6 subscales, namely, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life and self-acceptance. It is a 7-point rating scale, ranging from 1 for “strongly agree” and 7 for “strongly disagree”. The total score is in the range

of 18-108. In this scale, higher scores mean higher levels of psychological well-being. This shortened version's subscales have correlation coefficients ranging from 0.70 to 0.89. It has shown adequate criterion validity and content validity.

5.4. Research Design

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship of internet addiction with emotional intelligence and psychological well-being among hostel students, for which correlational research design is to be used. The study also investigates and compares the gender differences in internet addiction among hostel students; therefore, it also adopts a comparative design.

VI. RESULTS

Table 1: Table showing t-test of Male and Female Hostel Students on Internet Addiction score:

Groups	N	Mean	S.D.	't' value	df	p-value
Female	75	37.61	15.10	4.006	148	<.01**
Male	75	50.98	24.64			

**p<.01

The result table 1 reveals that there is significant difference between males and females on internet addiction. The mean and SD score of the male hostel students (m=50.98 and SD=24.68) respectively in Internet Addiction is more than their female counterparts (m= 37.61 and SD= 15.10).

Table 2: Table showing t-tests of Male and Female Hostel Students on Emotional Intelligence score:

Groups	N	Mean	S.D.	't' value	Df	p-value
Female	75	1.25	16.17	3.788	148	<.01**
Male	75	1.13	21.09			

**p<.01

The result table 2, indicates that the mean and SD score of the female hostel students (m=1.25 and 16.17) in Emotional Intelligence is more than their male counterparts (m= 1.13 and SD= 21.09).

Table 3: Table showing t-test of Male and Female Hostel Students on Psychological Well-being score:

Groups	N	Mean	S.D.	't' value	df	p-value
Female	75	86.68	15.38	1.341	148	.182
Male	75	83.25	15.91			

NS- Not Significant

The above table show that there is no significant difference between males and females on psychological well-being. The mean and SD score of the female hostel students on psychological well-being is 86.68 and 15.38, whereas that of male hostel students is 83.25 and 15.91.

Table 4: Table showing a correlation between internet addiction and emotional intelligence among hostel students:

	1	2
1. Internet Addiction	-	
2. Emotional Intelligence	-.500**	-

N=150 **Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (1- tailed)

Table 4 represents correlational analysis that examines the relationship between Internet Addiction and Emotional Intelligence, which reveals a negative or an inverse relationship between Internet Addiction and Emotional Intelligence.

Table 5: Table showing a correlation between internet addiction and psychological well-being among hostel students:

	1	2
1. Internet Addiction	-	
2. Psychological Well-being	-.537**	-

N=150 **Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (1- tailed)

Table 5 represents correlational analysis that examines the relationship between Internet Addiction and Psychological Well-being among hostel students, which indicates a negative or an inverse relationship between Internet Addiction and Psychological Well-being.

Table 6: Table showing a correlation between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being among hostel students:

	1	2
1. Emotional Intelligence	-	
2. Psychological Well-being	.617**	-

N=150 **Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (1- tailed)

Table 6 illustrates the correlational analysis that investigates the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Well-being among hostel students, which elaborates a direct and positive relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Well-being.

VII. DISCUSSION

Internet has become an integral part of daily living as it provides unparalleled access to information, communication and entertainment. The increasing use of internet among young adults has led to a surge in internet addiction, especially among students residing in hostels. Hostel students, often transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, can be identified as the population at risk for internet addiction due to increased independence and easy access to digital devices. The present study is aimed at understanding the role of Internet Addiction on Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Well-being among Indian hostel students. Additionally, the research also aims to study the gender difference that may exist among Indian hostel students in Internet Addiction, Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Well-being.

The study revealed a significant gender difference in the context of both internet addiction and emotional intelligence. Higher levels of internet addiction were exhibited by male hostel students as compared to females. This result is in line with prior researches which suggested that such a finding can be due to males being more prone to high impulsivity and sensation-seeking behavior resulting in excessive internet use and are less likely to monitor their internet usage (Ko, et al., 2007; Jaiswal & Kureel, 2020). On a contrary, female students scored significantly higher in emotional intelligence, which is consistent with prior research by Gur et al., (2012). They tried to explain this gender difference by suggesting that females may have a neurological advantage as they tend to have better connectivity between brain's hemispheres, which enhances their ability to process emotional and social information as compared to their male counterparts. However, no significant gender difference was observed in psychological wellbeing, which suggested that although both genders differ in their levels of internet addiction and emotional intelligence, they may experience similar psychological health in hostel settings. Hasan et al. (2018) yielded a similar finding and suggested that both male and female hostel students experience similar adjustment issues and quality of life, indicating vital role of hostel settings in student's life.

A negative correlation was found between internet addiction and emotional intelligence among hostel students ($r = -0.500$, $p < 0.01$), which can be due to impaired emotional regulation of individuals with high levels of Internet Addiction due to excessive screen time and real- life social interactions (Caplan, 2010). Moreover, excessive internet use can lead to cognitive and emotional overloading, which may reduce their emotional intelligence (Balakrishnan and Griffiths, 2017). A significant negative correlation was also found between internet addiction and psychological well-being ($r = -0.537$, $p < 0.01$). Internet Addiction results in social withdrawal, poor time management and disrupted sleep patterns, which are negatively related to psychological well-being (Young, 1998). Compensatory Internet Use Model (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014) also aligns with the study findings as it suggests that individuals use internet as an escape from the real-life stressors, thereby, exacerbating their underlying psychological struggles. This suggests that students with high Internet Addiction may use internet as a maladaptive coping mechanism, which can worsen their psychological well-being. A

positive correlation between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being among hostel students was also found through the study ($r= 0.617$ $p<0.01$). This finding aligns with that of Schutte et al. (2002), which highlighted the role of emotional intelligence in predicting low levels of anxiety and depression, which are negatively related to psychological well-being.

Internet Addiction impairs and threatens mental health while emotional intelligence helps preserve it. The results highlight the importance of integrating emotional skills training, stress management workshop and digital wellbeing programs within hostel environments. Interventions based on mindfulness, cognitive-behavioral strategies and peer support groups can help students reduce reliance on problematic internet use.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The study shows that internet addiction negatively affects emotional intelligence and psychological wellbeing among hostel students, with males being scoring higher on internet addiction and females reflecting stronger emotional skills. The findings highlight the importance of fostering emotional intelligence and balanced digital habits to safeguard students' wellbeing in hostel environment.

It can be concluded from the study that strengthening emotional intelligence may be one of the most effective strategies to reduce internet addiction and enhance psychological well-being among young adults, especially in hostel settings.

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