

Effects of Digital Addiction on Students' Mental Health: A Review

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Abstract:

Background: Digital technology has become an integral part of students' daily lives. Studying, communicating, and having fun are all made easier by digital gadgets, but excessive and unrestrained use has sparked concerns about digital addiction. Digital addiction includes problematic use of cell phones, social media, online gaming, and internet-based activities that interfere with daily functioning. There is growing evidence that excessive internet use may have detrimental effects on students' mental health, academic performance, social interactions, and overall wellbeing.

Material and Methods: Using electronic databases such as PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect, a thorough analysis of published literature was carried out. Research addressing the relationship between digital addiction and mental health outcomes in school, college, and university students that was published in English between 2015 and 2025 was reviewed. Based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria, pertinent studies were screened and examined.

Results: Significant correlations between digital addiction and poor mental health outcomes were frequently shown in the examined studies. Anxiety, sadness, stress, sleep problems, loneliness, low self-esteem, poor academic achievement, and impaired social functioning were common outcomes. The most common types of digital addiction among students were smartphone addiction and excessive usage of social media.

Conclusion: A significant public health concern among students is digital addiction. To lessen problematic computer, use and enhance kids' psychological wellbeing, early detection, digital literacy initiatives, parental supervision, counselling services, and institutional interventions are required.

Keywords: Addiction to digital devices, smartphones, the internet, social media, mental health, anxiety, depression, students, psychological well-being, and systematic review

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INTRODUCTION

Students can now access information, communicate effectively, and take part in virtual learning settings thanks to digital technology, which have completely changed educational systems around the world. ¹ Teenagers and young adults' screen time has dramatically expanded due to the quick development of cell phones, social networking sites, online gaming apps, and internet-based educational tools. ²

Excessive and obsessive use of digital devices in spite of detrimental effects on social, psychological, and intellectual spheres is referred to as "digital addiction."³ Despite the many advantages that digital technologies offer, educators, medical experts, and legislators are increasingly concerned about its unchecked usage. ⁴

Due to social influences, academic expectations, developmental concerns, and more access to digital gadgets, students are an especially vulnerable demographic. ⁵ Overuse of social media and smartphones has been connected to behavioural issues, emotional distress, poor sleep, difficulty focusing, and lower academic performance. ⁶

Students may be more likely to engage in negative digital behaviours as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic's acceleration of digital engagement through social interactions and online learning. ⁷ as a result, comprehending the connection between digital addiction and mental health consequences has become crucial for creating successful preventative and intervention plans. ⁸

This systematic review summarizes the most recent research on digital addiction and how it affects students' mental health.

Materials and Methods

In accordance with accepted review principles, a systematic review of the literature was carried out.

Search Strategy

The following keyword combinations were used to search electronic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar:

- Addiction to digital devices
- Addiction to smartphones
- Addiction to the internet
- Addiction to social media
- Mental well-being
- Depression
- Fear
- Learners
- Teenagers

Inclusion Criteria

- Research released between 2015 and 2025.
- Research articles that undergo peer review.
- Research involving students at a school, college, or university.
- Research on the effects of digital addiction on mental health.

- English-language articles.

Exclusion Criteria

- Abstracts from conferences, letters, and editorials.
- Research that only includes non-student populations.
- Articles with no metrics of mental health outcomes.
- Duplicate publications.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Narrative synthesis was used to gather and synthesize pertinent data on study design, sample characteristics, types of digital addiction, and mental health consequences.

Concept of Digital Addiction

Compulsive use of digital devices along with loss of control, withdrawal symptoms, tolerance, and functional impairment are the hallmarks of digital addiction.⁹ It encompasses a number of behavioural patterns, including excessive video streaming, smartphone addiction, internet addiction, social media addiction, and online game addiction.¹⁰

Because affected people experience cravings, emotional reliance, and difficulty cutting back on consumption despite negative effects, researchers have proposed that digital addiction is akin to behavioural addictions.¹¹

Types of Digital Addiction Among Students

Smartphone Addiction

One of the most common types of digital addiction among students is smartphone addiction. Excessive screen time and psychological reliance are caused by constantly checking social media, messaging apps, and notifications.¹²

Social Media Addiction

Compulsive usage of social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and X is known as social media addiction. Fear of missing out (FOMO), social validation, and online interactions might cause students to become too preoccupied.¹³

Internet Addiction

Uncontrolled internet use for activities like surfing, chatting, streaming, and online entertainment is referred to as internet addiction. Overuse of the internet can disrupt daily activities and academic obligations.¹⁴

Online Gaming Addiction

Persistent gaming behaviour that supersedes social, academic, and personal pursuits is a hallmark of online gaming addiction. It has been linked to social isolation and emotional instability.¹⁵

MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH DIGITAL ADDICTION

Depression: Numerous research has found a strong correlation between students' depressive symptoms and internet addiction. Overuse of screens might increase social comparison, decrease in-person relationships, and exacerbate depressive and hopeless thoughts.⁴

Anxiety: Anxiety connected to online interactions, notifications, academic distractions, and fear of social rejection is common among students with high levels of smartphone and social media addiction.¹³

Stress: Information overload, academic disruptions, cyberbullying, and constant online activity are

all ways that digital addiction exacerbates psychological stress. Due to excessive computer use, students frequently report having trouble maintaining their academic obligations.⁶

Sleep Disturbances: One of the most frequently mentioned effects of digital addiction is poor sleep quality. Overuse of screens at night can shorten sleep duration, delay the onset of sleep, and lower the quality of sleep.¹²

Loneliness and Social Isolation: Students may experience loneliness and social isolation as a result of excessive digital involvement, which may diminish genuine interpersonal relationships despite increased online connectivity.¹⁵

Reduced Self-Esteem: Regular exposure to idealized online information can have a detrimental effect on one's self-esteem and self-image, especially in young adults and teenagers.¹³

Academic Performance Problems: Reduced focus, procrastination, poor academic performance, and decreased classroom involvement have all been linked to digital addiction. Pupils frequently complain about having trouble focusing during educational sessions.⁵

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO DIGITAL ADDICTION

Several factors influence the development of digital addiction among students:

- Internet and smartphone services are easily accessible.
- Social influences and peer pressure.
- Emotional challenges and academic stress.
- FOMO (fear of missing out).
- Inadequate self-control.
- Social isolation and loneliness.
- Insufficient parental supervision.
- A greater reliance on online education.⁷

PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Effective strategies for reducing digital addiction among students include:

Digital Literacy Education

Students who participate in educational programs can learn how to use technology responsibly and spot warning indicators of harmful conduct.

Time Management Training

Reducing excessive screen time and increasing productivity can be achieved by teaching students time management skills.

COUNSELLING AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Counselling services at schools and universities are able to identify pupils who are at danger and offer them psychological support.

Parental Involvement

Teenagers' problematic use of technology can be decreased through parental supervision, conversation, and setting screen-time limitations.

Institutional Policies

Through awareness campaigns, wellness initiatives, and digital well-being programs, educational institutions should encourage balanced technology use.

Promotion of Physical Activities

Engaging in sports, leisure activities, and social interactions might enhance mental health outcomes and lessen dependence on digital devices.

DISCUSSION

The results of this systematic review show that students all across the world are increasingly concerned about digital addiction. Excessive use of digital technology has been repeatedly linked to negative mental health consequences, such as depression, anxiety, stress, sleep difficulties, loneliness, and low self-esteem.

The two types of digital addiction that are most frequently reported are smartphone addiction and social media addiction. These technologies raise the possibility of problematic use because they offer instant reward, social reinforcement, and constant accessibility. Digital platforms may be used by students who are struggling emotionally as coping strategies, which would reinforce addictive behaviours.

Adopting comprehensive prevention methods involving families, educational institutions, healthcare experts, and policymakers is also emphasized in the assessment. Programs for early intervention and awareness may lessen the impact of digital addiction and promote the mental health of kids.

CONCLUSION

Students are becoming more and more affected by digital addiction, which is strongly linked to poor mental health results. Overuse of smartphones, social media sites, internet services, and online gaming apps can lead to loneliness, stress, anxiety, depression, and poor academic achievement. In order to implement evidence-based treatments and encourage good digital behaviours, educational institutions, parents, and healthcare experts must work together. In order to combat student digital addiction, future research should concentrate on longitudinal studies and the efficacy of preventive measures.

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