

Pathological internet use in adolescents

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Abstract

Internet addiction, which is one of the handicaps seen as a result of modern lifestyle and technological development, can be defined as the inability to prevent the desire to use the internet excessively and the need for more and more time spent on the internet. Rather than banning the internet entirely, controlling its use is a more appropriate option. As in all addictions, when the problem cannot be solved, it is important to benefit from medical and cognitive therapies and, when appropriate, child and adolescent mental health counseling.

Keywords: Internet, adolescent, pathological

How to Cite: Dağ, H., & Coşkun, M. (2021). Pathological internet use in adolescents. *Konselor*, 10(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.24036/02021101111988-0-00>



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Introduction

Internet addiction, which occurs as a result of modern lifestyle and technological development, in general, can be defined as; inability to prevent the desire to use the internet excessively, the need for more and more time spent on the internet, the loss of importance of time spent without being connected to the internet, the emergence of extreme irritability, tension and restlessness when deprived and the deterioration of one's work, social and family life. The terms "pathological internet use", "internet addiction", and "compulsive internet use" were used to express problematic behavioral patterns associated with internet use. Internet usage has increased by 1000% in the last 15 years. Regardless of the specific terminology used, concerns about the potential harms of internet addiction are growing rapidly (Anderson, EL., Steen, E., Stavropoulos, V., 2017; Young, KS., 2004; [lvestatts 2021](#)).

Internet Addiction Diagnostic Criteria and Co-morbidities

Addiction can only be chemical addiction such as alcohol and drugs, as well as non-chemical addictions such as watching television, computer games, and excessive internet use. Internet addiction is increasing, especially in proportion to the widespread use of the internet. Although it is not included in the DSM-5 on mental disorders, it is planned to include the subtitle of internet addiction in the future in the additional section (Griffiths, MD., 1996; Spada, MM., 2014).

With the widespread use of the internet, the possible damages of the internet have started to be discussed. Almost all of the studies in this area have been carried out with the assumption that internet use is sometimes out of control of the individual and causes deterioration in social or professional/academic functionality. Besides, case reports of teenagers who died after days without sleeping on the internet have made this issue increasingly popular. This has also been a source of concern for families (Beard, KW., 2005; Koyama, A., Miyake, Y., Kawakami, N., Tsuchiya, M., Tachimori, H., Takeshima, T., 2010).

For the first time, Ivan Goldberg defined the term "internet addiction" and brought it to the discussion. Goldberg developed indicators for internet addiction in line with the substance addiction diagnostic criteria in DSM-IV. In the same years, Young defined 'internet addiction' based on the pathological gambling diagnostic criteria of DSM-IV. If 5 of the 8 criteria defined by Young, summarized in Table 1, are met, the person is defined as "internet addict" (Goldberg, I., 1999; Bozkurt, H., Şahin, S., Zoroğlu, S. 2016; Young, KS., 1996). As can be seen, although this kind of approach seems difficult to understand, the size

of the problem will become more understandable as patients suffering from this condition are determined and studies on this issue increase. As a result of the imposition of the problem itself, in some countries, there are even experts trained and guiding in the area of internet addiction. Internet usage is increasing in our country. Besides, the widespread use of distance education systems due to the Covid-19 pandemic has made this use somewhat compulsory. In proportion to the size of this problem, the issue of combating internet addiction will come to the fore more in the future.

Table 1 <Internet Addiction Diagnostic Criteria>

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1. Excessive mental effort related to the internet, thinking of being on the internet all the time
 2. The need to use the internet more and more for the desired level of enjoyment
 3. Unsuccessful attempts to control the internet
 4. Continuously exceeding the initial internet usage time
 5. Showing withdrawal symptoms such as depression and anger, in case of reducing or interrupting internet use
 6. Deterioration of social relationships (family, work, school) and career plans due to excessive internet use
 7. Reporting false statements about time spent on the internet
 8. Using the internet to get away from negative situations and emotions (despair, anxiety, depression)
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There is a relationship between pathological internet use disorder (PIU) and depression, anxiety symptoms, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, and aggression. However, there are also situations in which there are inconsistencies between comorbid diseases and psychopathology (Andreou, E., Svoli, H., 2013; Sasmaz, T., Oner, S., Kurt, AO., Yapici, G., Yazici, AE., Bugdayci, R., Sis, M., 2014). In some studies, an increase in suicide attempts was observed in patients with PIU. This is a chronic addictive disease, and recognizing and treating individuals at an earlier stage will reduce potential psychopathological conditions and suicide attempts (Morse, RM., Flavin, DK., 1992).

Adolescence is a difficult process with hormonal effects in terms of impulse control. Since PIU is also defined as impulse control disorder, it is obvious that hyperactivity disorder and attention deficit behavioral problems, which are accepted as impulse disorders, and aggressive behaviors are more common in adolescents with internet addiction (Kofler, MJ., Rapport, MD., Bolden, J., Sarver, DE., Raiker, JS., Alderson, RM., 2011; Skounti, M., Giannoukas, S., Dimitriou, E., Nikolopoulou, S., Linardakis, E., Philalithis, A., 2010).

Tahiroglu et al, in their study from Turkey, investigated the relationship between internet usage characteristics and pathological internet use in adolescents with or without psychiatric disorders. While 23.3% of adolescents with psychiatric disorders reported that they were using the internet for more than 8 hours a week, this rate was found to be 10.6% in the population sample. As a result of the study, a significant relationship was revealed between psychopathology and pathologic internet use in adolescents (Tahiroglu, AY., Celik, GG., 2010). Again, in the study of Bozkurt et al. using a structured questionnaire interview technique in adolescents with pathological internet addiction; attention deficit, social phobia, and major depression were found to be the most common psychiatric comorbidities, respectively (Bozkurt, H., Coskun, M., Ayaydin, H., Adak, I., Zoroglu, SS., 2013).

In proportion to the increased time on the internet, common conditions such as obesity, carpal tunnel syndrome, sleep disorders, back pain, and posture disorders are also observed. Patients also spend a lot of money related to the internet. This addiction may cause other problems in adolescents who do not have economic freedom and may negatively affect the communication between the family and the adolescent (Young, KS., 1996).

Treatment Approach

Although there are no evidence-based treatment strategies for the treatment of internet addiction, both pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy methods are recommended. In the presence of an underlying psychiatric disease, this condition should be treated first. Since there is impulse control disorder in internet addicts, serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI) can be used (Dell'Osso, B., Altamura, AC., Hadley, SJ., Baker, BR., Hollander, E., 2007). Cognitive-behavioral therapies can be used alone or in addition to pharmacotherapy. Some authors emphasize the role of cognitive factors in addiction, just as in depression, and the role of cognitive therapies as addiction is one of the methods of compensating for success. Patients prefer excessive internet use as a reward and pleasure tool (Davis, RA., 2001).

Conclusion

In a period when technology is so advanced, it is not possible to completely turn away from the internet or some other technological uses. As a part of preventive health services in our country and all over the world, it is necessary to protect children and adolescents from internet addiction and its psychosocial handicaps. It is necessary to do this not by completely denigrating or banning the internet, but by setting an appropriate and reasonable limit and controlling use. Families should be made aware of the limits to be allowed and in which situations to seek help. If the problem is in the direction of multiplication, child psychiatric counseling is important when necessary in non-chemical addictions as in all substance addictions.

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