



Review Article

Media addiction in adolescents

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Received : 02 April 2023

Accepted : 03 April 2023

Published : 10 May 2023

DOI

10.25259/KPJ_19_2023

Quick Response Code:



ABSTRACT

Internet is used by over 95% of adolescents and a majority of them have social media accounts. Social media and internet addiction develops imperceptibly and takes over the life of adolescents, with plenty of adverse outcomes. A knowledge of this condition is essential for all handlers of adolescents and recognising the red flag signs will ensure timely intervention and management. Some common suggestions that can be used by adolescents to monitor themselves and avoid excessive usage of social media must also be known by providers.

Keywords: Social media addiction, Net addiction, Social media platforms

WHAT IS ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social media has become a regular part of our daily life. Adolescents and young adults form a large chunk of social media users.^[1] This is the most convenient and best way to remain connected with peers and friends. Adolescents also use this as a means to extend their network, find or exchange information, materials and knowledge. Besides this, it is also used as a tool to construct their social identity in relation to peer groups in terms of popularity, acceptance and providing a sense of belonging.

IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ADOLESCENTS

The adolescent age is a stage of change in the biological, social and psychological environment. The adolescent undertake self-discovery and expression, discovers his/her identity and seeks peer approval while forging friendships and lasting relationships.^[2] Social media platforms are extremely important and vital for adolescents, as they strive to be accepted by their peers. This is also an area of relative freedom from parental monitoring, and hence, adolescents feel that they can share without inhibitions. They can extend their networks, exchange information and widen their knowledge through these platforms.

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION?

According to Wikipedia, addictions are a certain type of impulse control disorder. Social media addiction refers to an unhealthy dependence and uncontrollable urge to use the social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and many others such platforms.^[3] Arbitrary numbers of spending over 3–5 h on these platforms have been considered as pointing towards an addiction. There is *per se*, no gold standard diagnostic tool to measure this condition. It is considered a non-substance disorder, associated with a compulsive use to engage

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excessively in various platforms, with a negative impact on the life of the user.

Social media is used as a pastime, as a method to connect with family and loved ones, to watch videos, but above all, to gain peer approval, which builds confidence or otherwise, of adolescents and young adults.^[4] The Harvard Business Review mentions a study done on university students who used social media for over 3 hours/day, resulting in poor scholastic performance and sleep disturbances.

ASSESSMENT OF MEDIA ADDICTION

Social media has become an inveterate part of daily life. However, the transition from access to addiction is often imperceptible. Most addicts are not aware that they have developed a non-substance addiction, and that they need help to overcome this before it has detrimental effects on their health.

Several tools have been developed to assess this condition.

1. Bergen social media addiction scale (BSMAS) – This has six items and is a self-report scale.^[5] This is a brief and effective psychometric instrument that assesses those at risk of social media addiction. This BSMAS assesses six core elements of salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict and relapse. The scale ranges from 1 (very rarely) to 5 (very often). Higher scores indicate stronger addiction, with scores over 19 pointing to the possibility of problematic social media usage.
2. Internet addiction test – This is the most commonly used test created by Young in 1998. This is a 20-item symptom measuring tool for measuring the presence and severity of internet addiction.^[6,7] The results of this test can be used to categorise addictive behaviour into four categories-lack of addiction/mild signs of addiction/moderate signs of addiction/severe addictive behaviour.^[6] Several studies across the globe have used this tool and validated it as reliable for covering key characteristics of pathological internet use
3. Social media addiction scale: Was developed in 2016 by Eijnden *et al.* A score of 0–9 is taken on the scale with a cutoff point of 5. Items are scored as ‘NO = 0’ and ‘Yes = 1’. Adolescents with a score of over 5 are considered as social media addicts^[2]
4. Other tools available include^[7]
 - Chenud internet addiction scale
 - Internet addiction scale
 - Young of the internet addiction questionnaire.

RED FLAGS FOR INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION

Some pointers could act as early indicators to warn about the possibility of developing addiction to the internet including

social media usage. A close watch could guide the caretaker towards identifying the condition.^[6]

- The person is preoccupied with social media and the internet
- There is a need to spend more and more time on the internet to achieve satisfaction
- Unsuccessful attempts to control, reduce or interrupt the use of social media and internet
- Feeling anxious or depressed when stopping use of social media and the internet
- Endangers personal work, study and contacts
- Conceals the truth about addiction from the family members.

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION

According to currently available data, almost 5–10% of users of social media sites have an addiction issue.^[8] The effects of this non-substance addiction are myriad, as it has a significant influence on the brain.

- The physical health of adolescents is impacted as they spend hours glued to the internet-enabled devices. The likelihood of physical activity and exercise is limited
- Stress, anxiety and mental health issues
- Poor academic performance
- Deterioration of interpersonal relations
- Communication difficulties
- Poor coping skills
- Changes in socialisation
- Greater comparison with peers and others
- Increased incidence of depression
- Higher levels on anxiety
- Low self-esteem
- Eating disorders
- Cyberbullying.

The adolescents have an uncontrolled urge and desire to be accepted by others in their network. They constantly strive to get ‘views’, ‘likes’ and ‘shares’ to their posts. This desire makes them want to be constantly accessing the Internet and their social media platforms. They can go to any lengths to ensure they get what they want.

SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION AND CYBERBULLYING

The incidence of cyberbullying is higher amongst those with social media addiction. This results in greater stress levels, mental health issues and suicidal tendencies. Studies have shown that girls are more often subjected to cyberbullying compared to boys.^[9] This is a means of extending face-to-face bullying to an online environment. The bullying can

spread and the perpetrators can remain anonymous, leading to greater intensity through cyberbullying compared to the traditional ways. It is associated with higher likelihood of depression.

TIPS FOR SELF-REGULATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Following some basic rules will help to prevent/control social media and internet addiction.^[10]

- Track your time spent on social media sites
- Turn off notifications from social media apps to decrease or remove the distraction
- Reduce the number of social media platforms used, which will help to downsize the usage of social media
- Work with a partner who is motivated and can guide you back from excess social media usage
- Set aside a specific time and time limit when you will be using the social media platforms
- Set offline times at notified times/days when you will be completely offline
- Take a temporary break from social media usage.

CONCLUSION

Internet is used by over 95% of adolescents and a majority of them have social media accounts. Social media and internet addiction develops imperceptibly and takes over the life of the adolescents, with plenty of adverse outcomes. A knowledge of this condition is essential for all handlers of adolescents and recognising the red flag signs will ensure timely intervention and management.

Declaration of patient consent

Patient's consent not required as there are no patients in this study.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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How to cite this article: Nayak S. Media addiction in adolescents. *Karnataka Pediatr J* 2022;37:117-9.