

# Digital dilemma: Addressing the youth internet addiction surge

Sir,

The article titled 'Internet addiction among MBBS students at a New Delhi medical college: Prevalence and determinants of a silent pandemic' published in the February issue 13 (2): p. 730–735 demonstrated how internet addiction (IA) is prevalent among Delhi medical students addressing certain activities exacerbating addiction, warranting further research.

The surge in global internet usage, particularly among developing nations like India and China, has brought attention to the issue of IA among young individuals. Leading the pack is China, boasting the highest number of internet users at 1.412 billion, closely followed by India with 1.408 billion users.<sup>[1]</sup> IA, once predominantly observed among the working population and undergraduates, has now permeated into the lives of school-going children. Among Indian school-going adolescents, the prevalence of moderate and severe pathological internet use (PIU) stands at 21.5 and 2.6%, respectively, leading to PIU or IA, which can have significant implications for their mental health and well-being.<sup>[2]</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the issue, as lockdowns and restrictions have forced many educational institutions to shift to online learning, increasing young people's reliance on the internet for academic purposes. However, prolonged screen time and excessive internet use have led to a myriad of negative consequences, including delayed social and speech development, aggressive behaviour, attention issues, academic performance decline and familial conflicts.<sup>[3]</sup>

Among the myriad causes of IA, factors such as loneliness, isolation, academic pressures and seeking new social connections online are prominent. However, it is imperative to recognize and address clinical indicators early on, including insomnia, symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, low self-esteem, and underlying mental health conditions like depression and anxiety. Identifying these signs promptly and treating them on time is essential to prevent the development of addictive behaviours in children later on.<sup>[4]</sup>

China has taken strict measures to address IA among children and teens, including implementing rules to restrict internet access and smartphone usage during certain hours of the day. These measures aim to create a favourable online environment, prevent

and intervene in minors' IA problems and guide them towards forming healthy internet use habits. Additionally, the Chinese government has frozen approvals of new games and capped gaming time for children to combat addiction effectively.<sup>[5]</sup>

As the young population's internet usage continues to surge, stringent control over the content they access becomes imperative. This oversight can be facilitated by parental monitoring setting limits on screen time and monitoring children's online activities, bolstered by laws and policies governing internet usage among minors. Moreover, training healthcare professionals to promptly identify and intervene in cases of internet addiction contributes significantly to mitigating its prevalence.

Furthermore, promoting alternative hobbies and activities, such as sports, reading and spending quality time with family and friends, can help young people reduce their dependence on the internet and develop healthier offline habits.

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### Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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