A STUDY TO ASSESS THE PREVALANCE OF INTERNET ADDICTION AND ITS ASSOCIATED SIDE EFFECTS AMONG SCHOOL STUDENTS AT SELECTED SCHOOLS OF GUWAHATI, ASSAM

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Abstract: **Introduction**: The internet has become an essential part of everyday life, especially among adolescents. While it offers countless benefits in terms of communication, education, and entertainment, its excessive use has raised concerns over behavioral and mental health issues, particularly among school students. Internet addiction refers to the inability to control internet usage, which may lead to serious consequences in one's personal academic, and social life. **OBJECTIVES:** To assess the prevalence of internet addiction and identify the associated side effects among school students in selected schools. **METHODOLOGY:** A descriptive cross-sectional research design was adopted for the study. A total of 100 school students were selected using a non-probability convenience sampling technique from selected schools of Guwahati, Assam. Data were collected using a socio-demographic proforma, structured questionnaire on Internet Addiction Test, and a structured questionnaire on side effects of internet addiction. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. **RESULTS:** The findings revealed that 46% of the students had mild internet addiction, 23% had moderate internet addiction, 1% had severe internet addiction, and 30% had normal internet use. The mean internet addiction score was 39.47±16.11. Regarding side effects, the majority of students experienced mild physical side effects (58%), mild emotional side effects (42%), moderate academic side effects (45%), and moderate social side effects (48%). A statistically significant positive correlation was found between internet addiction and physical side effects ($r=0.224$, $p=0.025$), emotional side effects ($r=0.544$, $p<0.001$), academic side effects ($r=0.375$, $p<0.001$), social side effects ($r=0.304$, $p=0.002$), and total side effect score ($r=0.510$, $p<0.001$). Significant associations were found between internet addiction and age, class, father's education, occupation of father, and duration of internet use per day. **CONCLUSION:** The study concluded that internet addiction is prevalent among school students and is significantly associated with various physical, emotional, academic, and social side effects.

***Keywords*:** Internet addiction, side effects, school students.

INTRODUCTION

"Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master."

-Christian Lous Lange

The internet has become an essential part of everyday life, especially among adolescents. While it offers countless benefits in terms of communication, education, and entertainment, its excessive use has raised concerns over behavioral and mental health issues, particularly among school students. Internet addiction refers to the inability to control internet usage, which may lead to serious consequences in one's personal academic, and social life. School students from classes 9 to 12, being in a critical developmental phase, are especially vulnerable to this form of behavioral addiction[5]. Studies suggest that internet addiction can lead to various side-effects, including sleep disturbances, depression, anxiety, social isolation, poor academic performance, and physical health problems such as eye strain and headaches. It is crucial to assess the prevalence and side-effects of internet addiction among school

students to understand the magnitude of the problem and implement appropriate preventive and interventional strategies. This study focuses on assessing the level of internet addiction and identifying its associated physical, psychological, and social side effects among students of classes 9 to 12 in selected schools. [8–9]

The concept of internet addiction was first introduced by Dr. Ivan Goldberg in 1995 to describe compulsive and pathological internet use. [2] Griffiths later categorized it as a form of behavioral addiction, defining it through six core components: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse. [3] Davis, however, preferred the term "pathological internet use" (PIU) instead of addiction. Young compared excessive internet use to pathological gambling, an impulse control disorder listed in DSM-IV, and developed the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) by adapting its criteria.[2] She also identified different forms of internet addiction, including cybersexual addiction, cyber-relationship addiction, net compulsions, information overload, and computer addiction.[2] Caplan further examined Davis's model and found that social isolation contributes more significantly to problematic internet use than underlying psychological disorders, suggesting the term "problematic internet use" as more appropriate.[5]

Studies on prevalence show varying results. [5] Greenfield reported about 6% prevalence in the general population, while Scherer found it to be around 14% among college students. Online surveys indicate that 4–10% of users may meet the criteria for internet addiction, whereas general population studies estimate it to be between 0.3% and 0.7%. Individuals identified as addicted spend an average of 38.5 hours per week online, compared to 4.9 hours among non-addicted individuals. [2]

Assessing internet addiction has been challenging. Goldberg developed the Internet Addictive Disorder (IAD) scale based on DSM-IV criteria. [2] Brenner introduced the Internet-Related Addictive Behaviour Inventory (IRABI), consisting of 32 true/false questions. [5] Young initially created an 8-item Internet Addiction Diagnostic Questionnaire (DQ), later expanding it into a 20-item Internet Addiction Test (IAT). [2] Among these, Young's IAT is the most widely used and has demonstrated reliable psychometric properties. [2,5]

Most research in India has focused on college students, with limited studies on younger children. Therefore, the present study was conducted to assess the prevalence of internet addiction among children and adolescents, examine its relationship with sociodemographic factors, and identify potential risk and protective factors to guide early and effective intervention strategies.

NEED OF THE STUDY.

"The internet is becoming the town square for the global village of tomorrow."

— Bill Gates

In today's digital age, school students are increasingly reliant on the internet for learning, social interaction, and entertainment, which often leads to overuse and dependency. According to a 2023 report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), India has over 759 million active internet users, with a significant portion being under the age of 18, highlighting the growing digital engagement among school students (IAMAI, 2023). [10]

Adolescents in classes 9 to 12 are particularly vulnerable, as they are at a transitional stage marked by emotional, social, and academic challenges, making them prone to internet addiction. A nationwide survey by NCERT (2022) reported that over 37% of school students spent more than 4 hours daily online for non-academic purposes, indicating a shift from constructive to compulsive usage patterns (NCERT, 2022). [11]

Excessive internet use among students has been associated with negative side effects such as poor academic performance, sleep disturbances, anxiety, depression, eye strain, and social withdrawal. A World Health Organization fact sheet notes that 1 in 4 adolescents globally display symptoms of internet-related behavioral disorders (WHO, 2021). [12]

Despite growing concern, many schools and families lack awareness or strategies to identify and address internet addiction early among students. UNICEF (2021) reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, over 60% of adolescents in South Asia, including India, experienced difficulty managing screen time and digital habits, which led to increased mental health concerns (UNICEF, 2021). [13]

Kumar R, Sharma A, Sharma R (2020) conducted a study on internet addiction among high school students in India and emphasized the urgent need for awareness programs and behavioral guidance in educational settings. [14]

Hence, the present study is undertaken to assess the prevalence of internet addiction and its associated side-effects among school students. The findings of this study will help in developing awareness programs, preventive strategies, and interventions for promoting healthy internet usage and improving the well-being of students.

Given the rapid advancement of technology and the widespread availability of smartphones, tablets, and internet-enabled devices, internet use has become an integral part of students' daily lives. While the internet offers numerous educational and communication benefits, excessive and uncontrolled use may lead to internet addiction. Internet addiction has emerged as a significant public health concern among adolescents, affecting their academic performance, concentration, sleep patterns, physical health, mental well-being, and social relationships. Excessive internet use may also result in anxiety, depression, loneliness, stress, reduced physical activity, eye strain, and poor time management. School students are particularly vulnerable due to their developmental stage, curiosity, and increasing dependence on digital technology for learning and entertainment. Therefore, it is essential to assess the prevalence of internet addiction and identify its associated side-effects among school students. Understanding the magnitude of the problem will help educators, parents, healthcare professionals, and policymakers develop appropriate awareness programs, preventive measures, and intervention strategies to promote healthy internet use and improve students' overall well-being. Hence, the researcher felt the need to conduct a study entitled "A Study to Assess the Prevalence of Internet Addiction and its Associated Side-Effects among School Students" and selected the problem for further research.

OBJECTIVES

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

To assess the prevalence of internet addiction and identify the associated side effects among school students in selected schools.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

1. To assess the level of internet addiction among school students.
2. To identify the common side effects (psychological, physical, academic and social) associated with internet addiction.
3. To determine the correlation between the level of internet addiction and the severity of its side effects.
4. To determine the association between the level of internet addiction with demographic variables.

HYPOTHESES

- **H_1**: There is a correlation between the level of internet addiction and the presence of side-effects (Psychological, Physical, Academic and Social).
- **H_2**: There is a significant association between the level of internet addiction with the demographic variables.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted to assess the prevalence of internet addiction and its associated side-effects among school students at selected schools of Guwahati, Assam.

Research approach: Quantitative approach

Research design: Descriptive cross-sectional research design

Population- School Students

Target population-Students studying in class IX-XII of St. Joseph's High School and North East Public School of Guwahati, Assam

Accessible population- Students of class 9 to 12 who are present on the day of data collection

Sample size-100 samples

Sample technique -non-probability sampling (convenience sampling)

Theoretical framework: The conceptual framework for the study is based on Modified General System Theory

Tools for data collection-Demographic Proforma, self-structured questionnaire on internet addiction test, self-structured questionnaire on side-effects associated with internet addiction.

Data Analysis:

Result: SPSS version 20 used to analyze the collected data.

Table 1: Frequency, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum and Maximum Score of Internet Addiction Among School Students

(n =100)

Level of Internet Addiction	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Normal	30	30.0	39.47	16.11	6.00	86.00
Mild	46	46.0				
Moderate	23	23.0				
Severe	1	1.0				

Table 1 depicts that majority (46) 46% of the school students had mild level of internet addiction, followed by (30) 30% having normal level of internet use and (23) 23% having moderate level of internet addiction, whereas only (1) 1% had severe level of internet addiction. The mean internet addiction score was 39.47 with standard deviation of 16.11. The minimum obtained score was 6 and the maximum score was 86.

Table 2: Frequency, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum and Maximum Score of Physical Side Effects Among School Students

(n = 100)

Physical Side Effect Level	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Minimal	22	22.0	15.72	6.61	1.00	32.00
Mild	58	58.0				
Moderate	18	18.0				
Severe	2	2.0				
Total	100	100.0				

Table 2 depicts that majority 58 (58%) of the school students had mild physical side effects, followed by 22(22%) having minimal side effects and 18(18%) having moderate side effects, whereas only 2(2%) had severe physical side effects. The mean physical side effect score was 15.72 with standard deviation of 6.61. The minimum obtained score was 1 and the maximum score was 32.

Table 3: Frequency, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum and Maximum Score of Emotional Side Effects Among School Students

(n = 100)

Emotional Side Effect Level	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Minimal	23	23.0	16.36	7.37	1.00	36.00
Mild	42	42.0				
Moderate	33	33.0				
Severe	2	2.0				
Total	100	100.0				

Table 3 reveals that majority 42(42%) of the school students had mild emotional side effects, followed by 33(33%) having moderate side effects and 23(23%) having minimal side effects, whereas only 2(2%) had severe emotional side effects. The mean emotional side effect score was 16.36 with standard deviation of 7.37. The minimum obtained score was 1 and the maximum score was 36.

Table 4: Frequency, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum and Maximum Score of Academic Side Effects Among School Students

Academic Side Effect Level	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Minimal	18	18.0	19.30	7.80	2.00	40.00
Mild	32	32.0				
Moderate	45	45.0				
Severe	5	5.0				

Total	100	100.0				

(n=100)

Table 4 depicts that majority 45(45%) of the school students had moderate academic side effects, followed by 32(32%) having mild side effects and 18(18%) having minimal side effects, whereas 5(5%) had severe academic side effects. The mean academic side effect score was 19.30 with standard deviation of 7.80. The minimum obtained score was 2 and the maximum score was 40.

Table 5: Frequency, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum and Maximum Score of Social Side Effects Among School Students

(n = 100)

Social Side Effect Level	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Minimal	11	11.0	19.25	5.71	2.00	34.00
Mild	40	40.0				
Moderate	48	48.0				
Severe	1	1.0				
Total	100	100.0				

Table 5 reveals that majority 48(48%) of the school students had moderate social side effects, followed by 40 (40%) having mild side effects and 11(11%) having minimal side effects, whereas only 1(1%) had severe social side effects. The mean social side effect score was 19.25 with standard deviation of 5.71. The minimum obtained score was 2 and the maximum score was 34.

Table 6: Mean, Standard Deviation, Minimum and Maximum Total Side Effect Score Among School Students

(n = 100)

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Total Side Effect Score	70.63	19.91	22.00	125.00

Table 6 depicts that the mean total side effect score among school students was 70.63 with standard deviation of 19.91. The minimum obtained score was 22 and the maximum score was 125, indicating variability in the severity of side effects among the participants.

Table 7: Correlation Between Internet Addiction and Side Effects Among School Students

(n = 100)

Sl. No	Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value	Interpretation	Significance
1	Internet addiction and Physical side effects	0.224	0.025	Weak positive correlation	Significant
2	Internet addiction and Emotional side effects	0.544	0.000	Moderate positive correlation	Significant
3	Internet addiction and Academic side effects	0.375	0.000	Weak positive correlation	Significant
4	Internet addiction and social side effects	0.304	0.002	Weak positive correlation	Significant
5	Internet addiction and Total side effect score	0.510	0.000	Moderate positive correlation	Significant

Table 7 depicts the correlation between internet addiction and various side effects among school students. The findings revealed that there was statistically significant positive correlation between internet addiction and physical side effects *($r = 0.224$, $p = 0.025$)*, emotional side effects *($r = 0.544$, $p < 0.001$)*, academic side effects *($r = 0.375$, $p < 0.001$)*, social side effects *($r = 0.304$, $p = 0.002$)*, and total side effect score *($r = 0.510$, $p < 0.001$)*. The strongest positive correlation was observed between internet addiction and emotional side effects, indicating that increase in internet addiction was associated with increase in severity of side effects among school students.

Hence, research hypothesis (**H_1**) is accepted.

Table 8: Association Between Level of Internet Addiction with Demographic Variables Among school students

(n=100)

Demographic Variables	Normal	Mild	Moderate	Severe	χ^2	df	'p' value
1. Age					20.978	6	
14–15 years	23	17	8	0			0.002[s]
16–17 years	3	6	4	1			
18–19 years	4	23	11	0			
2. Gender					1.367	3	0.713[Ns]
Male	14	25	12	1			
Female	16	21	11	0			
3. Class					10.879	3	0.012[s]
IX	24	20	12	1			
X	6	26	11	0			
4. Religion					10.066	9	
Hinduism	20	24	17	1			0.345[Ns]
Islam	3	8	5	0			
Christianity	5	13	1	0			
Others	2	1	0	0			
5. Type of family					4.066	6	0.668[Ns]
Nuclear family	20	28	17	0			
Joint family	10	17	6	1			
6. Father's education					111.501	18	
Illiterate	0	0	0	1			
Primary school certificate	1	2	1	0			
Middle school certificate	5	11	6	0			0.000[s]
High school certificate	5	13	3	0			
Intermediate/Diploma	6	2	1	0			
Graduation	12	18	12	0			
Professional/Honours	1	0	0	0			

7. Mother's education					18.634	15	
Illiterate	1	5	1	1			
Primary school certificate	3	6	3	0			0.231[Ns]
Middle school certificate	5	11	2	0			
High school certificate	9	7	8	0			
Intermediate/Diploma	3	5	2	0			
Graduation	9	12	7	0			
8. Occupation of father					51.198	24	
Legislators/senior officials/managers	1	1	1	0			
Professionals	8	8	3	0			
Technicians/associate professionals	7	9	2	0			
Skilled workers/shop sales workers	5	8	7	0			0.001[s]
Skilled agricultural/fishery workers	0	0	1	0			
Craft/trade workers	2	0	0	0			
Plant/machine operators	0	1	1	1			
Elementary occupation	6	19	8	0			
Unemployed	1	0	0	0			
9. Mother occupation					16.797	21	
Legislators/senior officials/managers	1	7	2	0			
Professionals	4	2	0	0			
Technicians/associate professionals	1	4	3	0			0.723[Ns]
Skilled workers/shop sales workers	1	1	1	0			
Skilled agricultural/fishery workers	3	7	5	0			
Craft/trade workers	2	0	0	0			
Elementary occupation	0	1	0	0			
Unemployed	18	24	12	1			

10. Monthly income					**6.332**	**9**	
<25000	8	14	8	0			0.706[Ns]
25001–50000	10	13	3	1			
50001–75000	5	9	4	0			
>75000	7	10	8	0			
11. Place of residence					3.816	3	0.282[Ns]
Urban	21	24	13	0			
Rural	9	22	10	1			
12. Duration of internet use per day					22.197	6	0.001[s]
1–5 hours	26	18	10	0			
6–9 hours	2	16	8	0			
>9 hours	2	12	5	1			
13. Academic performance					3.318	9	0.950[Ns]
Excellent	9	14	8	0			
Good	8	16	7	0			
Average	12	15	8	1			
Poor	1	1	0	0			

***p<0.05 Level of significance** **NS- Non significant**

Table 8 depicts the association between level of internet addiction and selected demographic variables among school students. The findings revealed that there was statistically significant association between level of internet addiction and age *($\chi^2 = 20.978$, $p = 0.002$)*, class *($\chi^2 = 10.879$, $p = 0.012$)*, father's education *($\chi^2 = 111.501$, $p < 0.001$)*, and duration of internet use per day *($\chi^2 = 22.197$, $p = 0.001$)*. However, no statistically significant association was found between level of internet addiction and gender, religion, type of family, mother's education, monthly income, place of residence, and academic performance among school students. Therefore, the research hypothesis **(H_2)** stating that there is a significant association between level of internet addiction and selected demographic variables among school students is accepted.

DISCUSSION

- The findings of the present study revealed that majority (46%) of school students had mild internet addiction, while 23% had moderate internet addiction and only 1% had severe internet addiction. The mean internet addiction score was 39.47 ± 16.11. These findings indicate that internet addiction is prevalent among school students and that a considerable proportion of students are at risk of developing problematic internet use behaviours.[26]
- The findings of the present study revealed that majority of students experienced mild physical side effects (58%) and mild emotional side effects (42%), whereas moderate academic side effects (45%) and moderate social side effects (48%) were observed among a considerable proportion of students. These findings indicate that excessive internet use adversely affects multiple dimensions of adolescents' lives, including their physical health, emotional well-being, academic performance and social relationships.[35]

- The present study revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between internet addiction and physical side effects (r = 0.224), emotional side effects (r = 0.544), academic side effects (r = 0.375), social side effects (r = 0.304) and total side-effect score (r = 0.510).[26]
- The findings revealed that there was a statistically significant association between internet addiction and age, class, father's education and duration of internet use per day. Students who spent longer durations online showed higher levels of internet addiction.
- The findings suggest that demographic and behavioural factors play an important role in the development of internet addiction among adolescents. Duration of internet use per day emerged as one of the strongest contributing factors

These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Seva Oner et al., which identified duration of internet use as a significant predictor of internet addiction. Similar findings were reported by Prapti Gautam et al. (2024), who found that students using the internet for longer durations had significantly greater risk of developing internet addiction.[29]

Therefore, the research hypothesis H_2 was accepted.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that internet addiction is prevalent among school students and is associated with physical, emotional, academic, and social side effects. A significant positive correlation was found between internet addiction and its associated side effects. Internet addiction was also significantly associated with selected demographic variables such as age, class, father's education, and duration of internet use per day.

The findings highlight the importance of early identification, awareness, and preventive interventions to promote healthy internet use and the overall well-being of school students.

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