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Impact of the Internet on Mental Health among the Youths in San Jose, California

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Abstract

The internet has revolutionized the way we live, work, and communicate, providing access to vast amounts of information, services, and opportunities. Internet use can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, as youth are often exposed to idealized and unrealistic portrayals of other people's lives. The internet can expose people to harmful content, such as cyberbullying, hate speech, and violent or graphic images. This can trigger trauma, anxiety, and depression. The study used the descriptive research design. The target population was 300 youths in San Jose, California. The research did sampling of 220 participants that were chosen from the target population of 300 youths in San Jose, California. Questionnaires were utilized to gather the data. In conclusion, the internet has had a significant impact on mental health in San Jose, California with both positive and negative consequences. The impact of the internet on mental health among youths is a complex issue that warrants attention from parents, caregivers, educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers. While the internet has provided many benefits for youth, such as access to information, educational opportunities, and social connections, excessive internet use have negative impacts on mental health, including increased risks of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances. The research recommended that there should be more awareness campaigns aimed at educating the public, especially young people, about the potential risks associated with excessive use of the internet and especially social media. Young people should be educated about the risks and benefits of the internet hence helping them make informed decisions and use it in a safe and responsible way. The government and other relevant stakeholders should provide access to mental health resources such as counseling services, support groups, and online resources to help young people cope with the negative effects of the internet and build resilience.

Keywords: *Internet, Mental Health, Youths, California*

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1.0 Background of the Study

The internet is a global network of computers and other devices connected together, allowing the exchange of information and communication between individuals and organizations around the world (Chopra, Gupta & Lambora, 2019). The internet has revolutionized the way we live, work, and communicate, providing access to vast amounts of information, services, and opportunities. The internet has also facilitated the rise of e-commerce, e-learning, and telecommuting, making it easier for people to work and learn from anywhere in the world. The internet has also had significant impacts on social, cultural, and political dynamics, facilitating the growth of online communities, social media, and the spread of ideas and information. While the internet has many benefits, it also has some drawbacks, including the potential for cybercrime, online harassment, and addiction to technology (Badruzaman, 2023). The development and expansion of the internet continues to evolve rapidly, with new technologies and applications emerging regularly, creating new opportunities and challenges for individuals and organizations alike.

Mental health refers to the overall well-being of an individual's emotional, psychological, and social state, which affects their ability to function effectively in daily life (Gritzka, MacIntyre, Dörfel, Baker-Blanc & Calogiuri, 2020). Mental health conditions are common and can range from mild to severe, including anxiety disorders, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and personality disorders. Mental health is affected by a variety of factors, like genetics, life experiences, and environmental factors, such as stress and trauma. Mental health conditions can impact an individual's ability to work, maintain relationships, and enjoy life, and may have a significant effect on their overall quality of life. Early identification and treatment of mental health conditions are essential to improve outcomes and prevent the development of more severe symptoms. Treatment for mental health conditions may involve medication, therapy, or a combination of both, and may be delivered in a variety of settings, including hospitals, clinics, and community-based programs (Connery, McHugh, Reilly, Shin & Greenfield, 2020). Stigma and discrimination surrounding mental health can prevent individuals from seeking treatment and accessing support, highlighting the importance of reducing stigma and increasing awareness of mental health conditions.

The internet has become an integral part of the lives of many youths, providing access to information, social connections, and entertainment (McKinlay, Fancourt & Burton, 2021). Youth may use the internet for various activities, including online gaming, social media, streaming videos, and educational purposes. While the internet can have positive impacts on youth, including providing educational opportunities and facilitating social connections, excessive internet use can have negative impacts on youth mental health and well-being. Internet use is heavily linked with increased risks of anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and poor academic performance among youth (Ohayon & Roberts, 2021). Internet use can also contribute to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, as youth are often exposed to idealized and unrealistic portrayals of other people's lives. Cyberbullying is a growing concern for youth, as the anonymity and accessibility of the internet can make it easier for individuals to bully others online. Parents and caregivers can play a role in promoting healthy internet use among youth by setting appropriate limits on screen time, monitoring internet activity, and discussing the potential risks and benefits of internet use with their children (Geurts, Koning, Vossen & van den Eijnden, 2022). Educators and mental health professionals can also play a role in promoting healthy internet use by providing education and resources on safe and responsible internet use, including digital citizenship and online safety.

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Youth who are experiencing mental health issues related to internet use should seek support from mental health professionals, who can provide guidance and treatment to help them manage their symptoms and develop healthy coping strategies (Pretorius, Chambers & Coyle, 2019).

Zhao and Zhou (2020) noted that the internet has had both positive and negative impacts on mental health. Also, the internet has made it easier for people to access information about mental health issues and connect with others who are going through similar experiences. Online support groups and forums can provide a sense of community and help people feel less isolated. Excessive use of the internet, particularly social media, can have negative effects on mental health. A study by Boursier, Gioia, Musetti and Schimmenti (2020) has linked heavy social media use to increased feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Social media can also create unrealistic expectations and promote a culture of comparison, leading to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Additionally, the internet can expose people to harmful content, such as cyberbullying, hate speech, and violent or graphic images. This can trigger trauma, anxiety, and depression. It is important to use the internet in a mindful and balanced way, seeking out helpful resources while also taking breaks and engaging in self-care activities (Slowiak & DeLongchamp, 2022). It may also be beneficial to limit time spent on social media and seek support from mental health professionals when needed.

2.0 Literature Review

Szymkowiak, Melović, Dabić, Jeganathan and Kundi (2021) found that adolescents nowadays have grown up with information and communication technology that play an important role in their lives. One of the critical challenges in this setting is the relationship between the Internet and teenage mental health. The first issue addressed in this study is the association between Internet use and mental health, while the second is the deliberate use of the Internet with the aim of enhancing wellbeing. Social networking is the most popular Internet activity among young people. Online social networks can improve wellbeing by increasing self-disclosure and making social support available. Such empirical study findings support theories that stress the positive features of online connection. However, if teenagers are subjected to cyberbullying, social networks (and online communication in general) can have a substantial detrimental impact on their mental health. The second theme of the study is the intended use of the Internet to improve mental health. Online support groups, intended at assisting a group of individuals with a shared problem or life struggle, are the most accessible to the youth. These forums are often text-based, and this kind of communication offers several potential advantages for users. It is also possible to conduct online interventions that encourage and prevent mental health decline. According to research, online skill-based treatments can improve teenage mental health. The outcomes of the online preventative interventions show promising proof for computerized cognitive behavioral therapy treatments and their influence on anxiety and depression symptoms in adolescents. Despite its potentially harmful characteristics, the Internet has a positive relevance and promise for teenage growth.

Behera, Paluri and Mishra (2021) noted that excessive and continuous internet use has been linked to depression and other negative physical health issues. The goal of this study is to look at the link between internet usage frequency and health problems and depression levels among university students in Visakhapatnam, India. The research sample comprises of 120 university students from Visakhapatnam, India. The gender distribution of the sample was 50 men and 53 females. The author distributed questionnaires to students in groups in a lecturer room setting. Participation was

entirely optional. This research included 120 students in total. Seventeen of them had to be eliminated because they did not complete all of the questionnaires correctly, leaving the final sample of 103 students. The findings show a link between sadness and heavy internet use (>6-8 hours per day), with a Chi-square value of 33.70 and $p < 0.02$. Moreover, when internet usage increases, systolic blood pressure rises significantly ($F = 4.43$ and $p < 0.06$). According to this study, excessive internet use is undoubtedly causing mental health problems like depression as well as physical health concerns like high blood pressure.

Kitchen and Fraser (2020) discovered that many aspects of modern digital life are being influenced by internet, including business, governance, education, health, and crucial human connection. Teenagers can also be negatively influenced by internet, which can confuse them, disrupt their health, and expose them to cyberbullying, rumor spread, erroneous perceptions of other people's lives, and peer influences. Some mental health concerns, such as depression and suicide, have become increasingly common among teenagers in recent years. According to the various researchers listed below, regular use of internet may be detrimental to one's mental health and cause social difficulties. One of the primary worries parents should have about their children's excessive usage of internet is the recommendation to overcome these challenges. We can plainly see how internet is affecting this generation, this youngsters and adolescents. It is undeniably harmful physiologically, just as spending a whole day in front of a screen damages one's eyesight. This lack of information is particularly alarming in light of today's younger population, because teens and young people spend a substantial amount of time on the internet socializing, putting them at a higher risk of harmful effects. Modern teen mentalities are increasingly reliant on internet.

Afrin, Nasrullah, Dalal, Tasnim, Benzadid, Humayra and Hawlader (2022) argued that the COVID-19 epidemic has significantly altered lives of many people. Internet might have had a substantial influence on teenagers' and students' mental health (MH) due to increased screen usage during the epidemic. This review of the literature intends to consolidate the findings on the influence of internet use on the mental health of adolescents and students during the first year of the COVID-19 epidemic. In September 2021, a review of the published literature was undertaken using the PubMed and Web of Science Core Collection databases. The search produced 952 records, with 20 articles chosen for this evaluation. The majority of the included research found that internet usage had a detrimental influence on the MH of adolescents and students, most notably anxiety, sadness, and stress. More active and longer internet use was linked to a detrimental influence on adolescents' and students' MH. Two studies found some potentially positive benefits, such as coping assistance and creating a feeling of connection for persons who had become isolated as a result of social distancing approaches. Because this study concentrates on the early stages of the pandemic, future research need to look at the long-term influence of internet use on teens' and learners' mental health, including all essential factors which may enable an adequate public health response.

Özaslan, Yıldırım, Güney, Güzel and İşeri (2022) conducted study to examine the link between Taiwan teenage Internet usage and mental health. The 2019 Taiwan Youth Risk Behavior Web-Based Study includes 15,353 high school students aged 15-20 in this cross-sectional survey. The participants' average daily Internet usage time was 183.51.5 minutes. The amount of time spent on the internet was related to sex, grade level, school type, housing arrangement, economic position, academic success, and experience with school violence. In terms of mental health, Internet usage time was connected to subjective health status, stress, emotions of despair, and suicide thoughts.

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When compared to the group with less than average Internet usage, the group with more than average Internet usage indicated lower subjective health, a greater level of stress, emotions of melancholy, and suicide thoughts. Interventions to reduce Internet usage and leisure activities which may substitute Internet usage must be created in order to properly manage Internet usage time.

Koehler and Parrell (2020) noted that the relationship between excessive internet usage and a rise in mental health conditions has long been proven. However, there is a gap in the research on the responses of mental health practitioners/providers to this issue. This mixed-methods research utilized two theoretical views the Ecological Model and the Generalist Intervention Model to determine how much mental health practitioners/providers analyze the impact of increased internet use on mental health. Qualtrics was used to collect qualitative and quantitative data from 136 mental health practitioners (N = 136). Non-parametric tests and descriptive data indicated that mental health practitioners' attitudes to internet use and its impact on mental health are affected by prior training, agency values, and credentials. Meanwhile, qualitative researches identified three mental concerns associated with uncontrolled internet usage: poor self-esteem, increased despair, and increased anxiety. The results' implications for theory, research, social work practice, and social work education were studied.

Veisani, Jalilian and Mohamadian (2020) conducted study to identify Internet Addiction (IA) in teenagers and to investigate the relationship between IA and mental health in youths. This cross-sectional survey was carried out in the city of Hamburg in 2020. 400 young people were included in this study by stratified cluster sampling, with clusters representing regions and learning institutions. To conduct the interviews, reliable questionnaires such as the Internet Addiction Test and the 25-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-25) were employed. To determine the relationship between the two variables, the correlation statistical approach was applied. The significance threshold was set at 0.05. The respondents' mean standard deviation age was 15.30 ± 1.347 years; their total IA and mental health scores were 35.21 ± 15.40 and 20.19 ± 8.64 , respectively. We discovered that 6.7% of the teenagers had severe IA. Lack of control with anxiety, neglect work and social dysfunction, and neglect social life and severe depression were shown to be statistically substantial in internet users: $r(234) = 0.161, P < 0.042$; $r(234) = 0.115, P < 0.032$; and $r(234) = 0.143, P < 0.054$, two-tailed. Based on the findings, excessive internet usage, lack of control, and neglect of social life are substantially associated to mental health in teenagers; the findings may help to build theoretical models for IA in adolescents.

Roy, Singh, Mishra, Chinnadurai, Mitra and Bakshi (2021) conducted study to investigate whether the influence of Internet use on the mental health problems of older persons varies by health condition and economic level in Shanghai, China. This study draws on data from a large sample of 1573 people aged 50 to 70 in Shanghai, China. This study uses 8-item version of the Hopkins Symptom Checklist to examine mental health issues, a 5-item scale to assess Internet use, and a 10-item scale to assess chronic conditions. The authors utilize ordinary least square regression models to examine the relationships between Internet use and mental health issues across income levels and health conditions. Elderly persons who use the Internet more regularly have a significantly decreased risk of developing mental health problems. Further research reveals that chronic illnesses and household income have moderating roles in mental health disorders. Chronic disorders greatly enhance the link between Internet use and mental health issues. Meanwhile, Internet use decreases the mental health issues of older people more in the low-income group than

in the high-income group. This study provides evidence for the detrimental relationship between Internet use and mental health concerns. It also suggests that Internet use may lessen more mental health issues in low-income and ill people. As a result, boosting Internet use among the low-income and ill groups is proposed as a viable way to enhance the mental health of the elderly.

3.0 Research Methodology

The study used the descriptive research design. The target population was 300 youths in San Jose, California. The research did sampling of 220 participants that were chosen from the target population of 300 youths in San Jose, California. Questionnaires were utilized to gather the data.

4.0 Research Findings and Discussion

The research findings and discussions are presented in sections.

4.1 Correlation Analysis

The results presented in Table 1 describe the correlation analysis

Table 1: Correlation Analysis

		Mental Health	Internet
Mental Health	Pearson Correlation	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Internet	Pearson Correlation	.232 **	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000

The correlation results from Table 1 show that the internet was positively and significantly associated with mental health ($r=.232$, $p=.000$). This concurs with Roy, Singh, Mishra, Chinnadurai, Mitra and Bakshi (2021) who reported that chronic disorders greatly enhance the link between Internet use and mental health issues. The internet provides access to a wide range of content, including violent and pornographic material, which can have negative effects on mental health, particularly for young people who may not have the emotional maturity to process this content.

4.2 Regression Analysis

The section consists of model fitness, analysis of variance and regression of coefficient. The findings presented in Table 2 indicate the model fitness

Table 2: Model Fitness

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.232a	0.221	0.143	0.0008656

The results from Table 2 indicate that internet was discovered to be satisfactory in explaining the mental health among the youths in San Jose, California. This was supported by the coefficient of determination, also known as the R square of 0.221. This shows that internet explain 22.1% of the variations in the mental health among the youths in San Jose.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.12	1	5.12	147.98	.000b
	Residual	10.38	300	0.0346		
	Total	15.50	299			

The result in Table 3 shows that the overall model was statistically significant. The findings indicate that mental health is a good predictor in explaining the internet among the youths in San Jose, California. This was supported by an F statistic of 147.98 and the reported p-value of 0.000 which was less than the conventional probability significance level of 0.05.

Table 4: Regression of Coefficient

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.423	0.142		2.979	0.087
Internet	0.743	0.323	0.596	2.300	0.025

Based on the results presented in Table 4, it was found that internet was positively and significantly associated to mental health ($\beta=0.743$, $p=0.025$). This was supported by a calculated t-statistic of 2.300 that is larger than the critical t-statistic of 1.96. The results implies that when the rate of internet improves by one unit, the mental health among the youths in San Jose, California will increase by 0.743 units while other factors that influence the mental health remain unchanged. Behera, Paluri and Mishra (2021) articulated that excessive internet use is undoubtedly causing mental health problems like depression as well as physical health concerns like high blood pressure. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter can be a source of stress, anxiety, and depression for young people. The pressure to present a perfect image, the fear of missing out, and the possibility of cyberbullying can lead to feelings of insecurity, loneliness, and social isolation. While the internet has many benefits, it can also have negative effects on mental health among youths in San Jose. It is important to promote digital literacy, encourage healthy habits, and provide access to mental health resources to minimize these negative effects and promote positive mental health among young people. The internet has become an integral part of the lives of young people in San Jose and beyond.

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the internet has had a significant impact on mental health in San Jose, California with both positive and negative consequences. While the internet has provided access to valuable mental health resources and a sense of community for those struggling with mental health issues, excessive use of social media and exposure to harmful content can contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns. It is important to use the internet in a mindful and balanced way, seeking out helpful resources while also taking breaks and engaging in self-care activities. Mental health professionals can also provide support and guidance in navigating the potential risks and benefits of the internet on mental health. As technology continues to evolve, it is important to remain aware of its potential impact on mental health and take proactive steps to promote well-being in the digital age.

The impact of the internet on mental health among youths is a complex issue that warrants attention from parents, caregivers, educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers. While the internet has provided many benefits for youth, such as access to information, educational opportunities, and social connections, excessive internet use have negative impacts on mental health, including increased risks of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances. Furthermore, the rise of cyberbullying and the pressure to present an idealized self-image on social media may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem among youth. To promote positive mental health among youth in the digital age, there is a need for increased awareness, education, and support for healthy internet use. This includes setting appropriate limits on screen time, monitoring internet activity, promoting safe and responsible internet use, and encouraging balanced use of technology. By implementing these strategies, we can help to mitigate the negative impacts of the internet on mental health among youth in San Jose, California and foster a supportive and healthy online environment for all.

6.0 Recommendations

The research recommended that there should be more awareness campaigns aimed at educating the public, especially young people, about the potential risks associated with excessive use of the internet, especially social media. There is a need to promote balanced use of the internet. This includes taking breaks from social media and other online activities to engage in offline activities, such as exercise and socializing with friends and family. Social media firms should take responsibility for creating a more supportive online environment by promoting positivity, reducing cyberbullying, and providing resources for users who may be struggling with mental health issues. Individuals who are experiencing mental health issues should seek professional help from mental health providers. Telehealth services can provide convenient access to mental health care, especially for those who may not have easy access to in-person services. There is a need for more research on the impact of the internet on mental health. This will help to identify potential risks and develop effective interventions to promote positive mental health in the digital age. Young people should be educated about the risks and benefits of the internet hence helping them make informed decisions and use it in a safe and responsible way. Encouraging young people to engage in physical activities, get enough sleep, and maintain a healthy diet can help counteract the negative effects of excessive internet use. Providing access to mental health resources such as counseling services, support groups, and online resources can help young people cope with the negative effects of the internet and build resilience.

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