

# Is the emerging pandemic of internet addiction leading to social isolation amongst adolescents?

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## Abstract

Internet addiction can have tremendous far reaching consequences. It provides the adolescents with an illusion of companionship who miss out on spending quality time with real friends and family with whom they meet every day.

**Keywords:** Internet addiction, Social isolation, Adolescents

## Introduction

Internet is the global system of inter connected computer networks that was developed with an aim to link the world as one unit. It led to either modification or replacement of most of the traditional systems of communication. It can be accessed using multitude of devices including mobile handsets, personal computers and laptops. This collaborative network has gone a long way in dispensing information and ideas across the world besides being a cheap medium of social networking and entertainment as well.

However it is well known that excessive and/or improper use of any new technology can turn it into a bane from a boon. Similarly, internet addiction, especially amongst adolescents world wide, is an emerging pandemic. It is currently creating a situation where the adolescents are virtually connected to numerous friends/ acquaintances and even strangers globally while in non-virtual life, they are facing severe social isolation. In a study by Mane S et al moderate and severe internet addiction has been reported to the tune of 63.4% and 11.2% amongst school going adolescents in India [1]. Internet addiction can have tremendous far reaching consequences.

It provides the adolescents with an illusion of companionship who miss out on spending quality time with real friends and family with whom they meet everyday. It can also lead to issues related to body image as a result of comparison with others photo shopped pictures and overly idealized status updates

imparting an impression that their virtual friends have an ideal lifestyle. This has been reported to have led to depression amongst adolescents or a source of continuous stress in order to match up with their virtual friends who are as per internet data leading an envious fabulous lifestyle.

Besides the serious social and psychological adverse effects of internet addiction, physical health of adolescents too is at stake with ever growing internet addiction leading to increase in prevalence of obesity, high blood pressure, low HDL cholesterol, poor stress regulation and insulin resistance; all contributing as important risk factors for cardiovascular diseases [2].

Poor sleep time and quality of sleep as a result of internet addiction has been reported to result in increase in ADHD like symptoms, depressive symptoms and suicidal tendencies amongst internet addicts. Premature/ prolonged exposure to violent content via internet has been known to result in antisocial behaviour.

Poor social coping skills and self care have been linked to increase internet screen time [3].

The American Psychiatric Association recently included internet gaming disorder (IGD) as a potential diagnosis, recommending that further studies be conducted to help illuminate it more clearly [4]. It is highly prevalent amongst adolescent internet addicts with numerous deaths too being reported due to blue whale challenge

game. An interesting observation amongst adolescent internet addicts detected by functional MRI evaluation been reduced levels of self-related brain activation and decreased reward sensitivity irrespective of the type of reward and feedback [5].

Thus, adolescent internet addicts are an everincreasing group globally and it is high time that effective strategies are planned and timely implemented world wide with an aim to prevent their social isolation and emotional exhaustion.

**Funding:** Nil, **Conflict of interest:** None initiated,  
**Perission from IRB:** Yes

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**How to cite this article?**

Aulakh R. Is the emerging pandemic of internet addiction leading to social isolation amongst adolescents?. *Int J Pediatr Res.* 2018;5(2):46-47. doi:10.17511/ijpr.2018.i02.01.

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