

EFFECTIVENESS OF GROUP COUNSELING ON INTERNET ADDICTION AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN SELECTED COLLEGES IN CHENNAI

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DOI: 10.63001/tbs.2025.v20.i02.S2.pp194-198

KEYWORDS

Group counselling,
Internet addiction,
College students.

Received on:

22-02-2025

Accepted on:

20-03-2025

Published on:

28-04-2025

ABSTRACT

Background: The term “internet addiction” is mentioned, it refers to the internet usage of an individual, to the extent that it becomes compulsive and makes it impossible for the individual to carry out his/her routine life, work and social function.

Methodology: A quasi-experimental research design using pretest, post-test design was used. The study was designed for a total time of four months, which include two months for intervention and two months for post evaluation. The study was conducted in selected colleges in Chennai, colleges and students meeting the inclusion criteria were purposively sampled.

Results: The result showed that after the intervention, the study shows a significant reduction in internet addiction indicated by the mean score falling from 56.4 (SD = 10.1) to 43.2 (SD = 8.7), $t = 7.53$, $p = 0.000$. The effectiveness of group counseling is proved by moderate addiction drop down (45.7%) and severe addiction (31.4%) while the mild addiction went up to 51.4% and the severe addiction went down to 14.3%. There were significant associations between educational level ($p = 0.043$), stream of study ($p = 0.001$), and internet usage ($p = 0.000$) and internet addiction. They were also related to education ($p = 0.002$) and marital status ($p = 0.02$), but age, gender, socio-economic status, and having a mental health history were not associated with the degree of change in symptoms. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that group counseling successfully decreases the level of internet addiction in college students. The numbers of people in addiction decreased dramatically after the targeted interventions were implemented.

INTRODUCTION

The term “internet addiction” is mentioned, it refers to the internet usage of an individual, to the extent that it becomes compulsive and makes it impossible for the individual to carry out his/her routine life, work and social function.[1]

Because of the developmental stage of students in college and the impact of lifestyle changes at this time of life, there is strong evidence that they are susceptible to developing addictive behaviors. Since the regular students' access to easy internet and the opportunity to stay away from their parents in the process of transition to the college life exposes them to excessive use of the internet. [2]

In addition, the Internet usage patterns have been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, as universities moved online learning, a number of students had a rise in screen time, and as such, they experienced a surge in rates of internet addiction and stress and anxiety afterwards. Research has indicated that there is a high rate of co morbidity of internet addiction and depression, anxiety and low self-

esteem, both resulting in and stemming from a state of excessive internet use. [3,4]

Therapeutic approach group counseling for internet addiction has some benefits. With this modality, students can share their stories and their challenges with the peers and create a mutual support and understanding environment.[5] Zhang et al. conducted research that supports the use of solution focused group counselling interventions in the reduction of internet addiction among college students. [6]

In addition, group counselling can be modified according to the characteristics of the particular demographic group and to the issues that they face which are unique to such students. For instance, gender differences exist regarding addictive patterns in the use of internet; male students have reported higher compulsion levels on the use of internet for gaming and social media use as compared to the female students. [7,8]

The prevalence of internet addiction and especially the group of college students has grown. Therefore, it is essential to apply group counseling in the form of an intervention strategy. To address the intricate association of reasons underlying internet

addiction, group counseling has the potential to leverage peer support, educational resources and evidence based therapeutic techniques. As college students move on with their lives in the digital world, it is important that we provide effective interventions to help them regain control over their internet use to enable healthier and balanced lives.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aimed evaluate the Effectiveness of Group Therapy on Internet Addiction Among College Students in Selected Colleges in Chennai.

METHODOLOGY

A quasi-experimental research design using pretest, post-test design was used for the data collection to assess the effectiveness of the group counselling regarding Internet Addiction among college students in selected colleges of Chennai. The study was designed for a total time of four months, which include two months for intervention and two months for post evaluation. The study was conducted in selected colleges in Chennai, colleges and students meeting the inclusion criteria were purposively sampled. The study targeted participants among college students aged 18-25 years, and willing participants with moderate to high level of internet addiction. Using an internet addiction tool, 700 students were screened and 175 students who met the criteria were included in the study. The study did not include students already diagnosed with very mental illness or already receiving some form of psychological treatment.

Tools

The study collected demographic variables like age, gender, educational level, stream of study, socio-economic status, internet usage, previous mental health history and type of internet addiction. The severity of internet addiction was measured using Kimberly Young's Internet Addiction Test (IAT), a 20-item Likert scale that measures the degree to which internet usage interferes with daily life (higher scores indicate greater internet addiction). These two tools were applied during the pretest and posttest phases of the study to check changes after utilizing the group counseling.

Data Collection Procedure

The institutional ethical committee approved the study. Following informed consent procedures, the pre-test involved collecting demographic information using a questionnaire which was then followed by administering the Internet Addiction Test to assess the level of internet addiction. First, college students diagnosed with internet addiction underwent an 8-week group counselling. At the end of the intervention, Young's Internet Addiction Test were readministered in a post test, to evaluate the changes in internet addiction.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS software version 26 used for statistical analysis. Demographic data and baseline scores of internet addiction

Table 1: Demographic variables of the college students. N=175

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	18-20 years	60	34.3%
	21-23 years	85	48.6%
	24-25 years	30	17.1%
Gender	Male	90	51.4%
	Female	80	45.7%
	Other	5	2.9%
Educational Level	Undergraduate	150	85.7%
	Postgraduate	25	14.3%
Stream of Study	Arts	40	22.9%
	Science	60	34.3%
	Commerce	50	28.6%
	Engineering	25	14.3%
Socio-economic Status	Low	40	22.9%
	Middle	100	57.1%
	High	35	20%
Internet Usage	Less than 2 hours/day	45	25.7%
	2-4 hours/day	95	54.3%
	More than 4 hours/day	35	20%
Previous Mental Health History	Yes	30	17.1%
	No	145	82.9%
Type of Internet Addiction	Social media	100	57.1%

were summarized by using descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation and frequency distribution. To investigate the effectiveness of the group counselling, paired t-tests were conducted to compare Internet Addiction pre-test and post-test scores.

Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from all participants and ensuring voluntary participation. Confidentiality of participant data was maintained throughout the study. The research adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring no harm or distress to participants.

RESULTS

Demographic variables

The table 1 provides demographic details about 175 college students. Most of them are male (51.4%), aged 21-23 (48.6%), and undergraduates (85.7%). Most of the students are studying science (34.3%) or commerce (28.6%). In terms of the background, most of the respondents are middle-class (57.1%) and spend 2-4 hours on average on social media (54.3%). The vast majority of students do not have a psychiatric history (82.9%) with social media being the most common form of internet addiction (57.1%).

Internet Addiction

For Internet Addiction, the pretest mean was 56.4, mean standard deviation was 10.1, post-test mean was 43.2 and mean standard deviation was 8.7. The Internet Addiction is significantly reduced with t-value of 7.53 and p-value 0.000. (Table 2). The pretest indicated that 45.7% of them were in the moderate internet addiction level while 31.4% in the severe internet addiction level (figure 1). As a result of intervention, it is observed; the percentage significantly changed to mild addiction 51.4 and severe addiction 14.3. Consequently, this indicates that the group counselling acted to decrease the severity of the participants' internet addiction.

Association

The table 3 shows that in the sample of 175 respondents, there are significant relationships between different demographic variables and internet addiction. There was a significant association between the educational level ($p = 0.043$), stream of study ($p = 0.001$) and internet usage ($p = 0.000$) with internet addiction which indicates these factors are strongly related to internet addiction. Statistically significant associations were detected for internet addiction for education, with $p = 0.002$ and for marital status $p = 0.02$, however no significant associations were detected for age ($p = 0.103$), gender ($p = 0.249$), socio economic status ($p = 0.270$) and previous mental health history ($p = 0.341$), indicating these variables do not have a strong influence on internet addiction in this sample.

	Gaming	50	28.6%
	General Browsing	25	14.3%

Table 2: Comparing the mean and standard deviation of Internet addiction score.

Variable	Pre-test Mean	Pre-test SD	Post-test Mean	Post-test SD	t-value	p-value
Internet Addiction	56.4	10.1	43.2	8.7	7.53	0.000

*Significance

Figure 1: Internet addiction level among college students. N=175

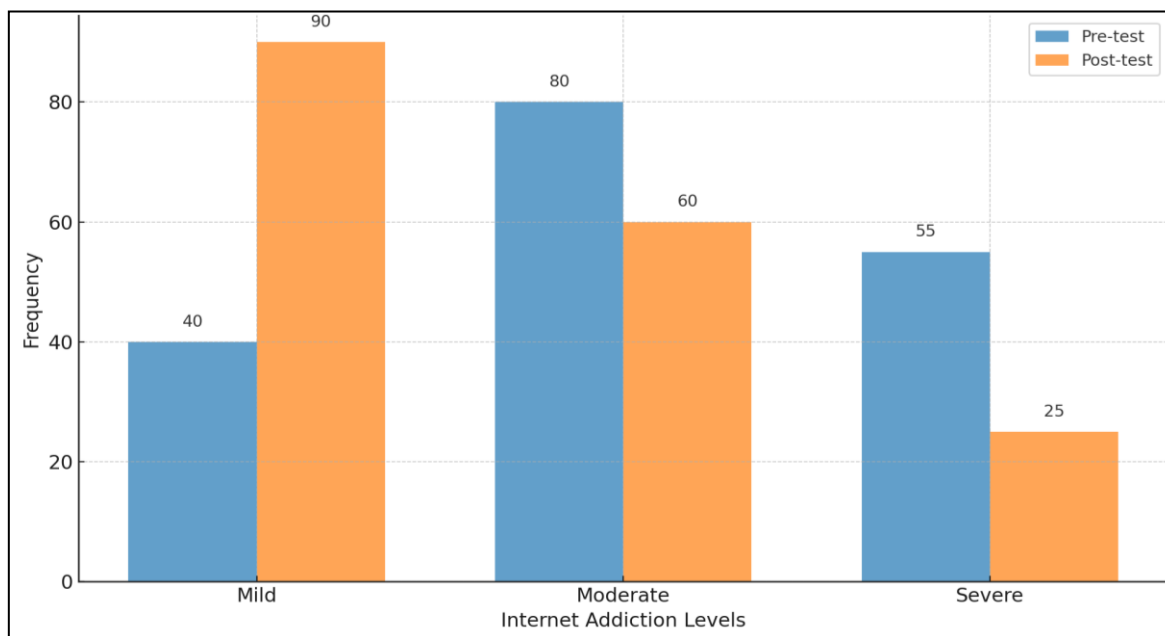


Table 3: Association of demographic variables with the internet addiction. N=175

Demographic Variable	Chi-Square Statistic	p-value
Age	4.56	0.103
Gender	2.78	0.249
Educational Level	8.12	0.043
Stream of Study	15.34	0.001
Socio-economic Status	3.92	0.270
Internet Usage	24.56	0.000
Previous Mental Health History	0.91	0.341
Type of Internet Addiction	6.87	0.0778

*Significance

DISCUSSION

The results of the study which attempts to investigate the effectiveness of group therapy in reducing internet addiction of the college students in Chennai suggest that the intervention programme had a positive effect on the internet usage of the participants. This supports group counseling as a therapeutic modality, as the substantial mean reduction in the internet addiction score from 56.4 (SD = 10.1) to 43.2 (SD = 8.7) and decrease of proportions of severe addiction (from 31.4% to

14.3%) and proportion of moderate addiction (from 45.7% to a lesser extent) indicate.

This result is consistent with previous research linking well-structured psychological intervention to reducing symptoms of addiction among young people which conclude that group therapy promotes reflection and learning in groups of people who require overcoming these patterns of behaviors.[9,10] The reduction in addiction levels was high was highly significant to the supportive group environment that enabled participants to share their experiences and coping mechanisms. The study

illustrates the fact that due to identity support and emotional support from peers people are less likely to use the internet in harmful ways, just as in the current study. [11,12]

Furthermore, the research also showed large correlations between educational levels, streams of study and internet usage behaviors and internet addiction. According to previous studies, the similar levels of internet dependency among students engaged in the demanding programs can be explained that the students resort to internet dependency as a way to manage stress or anxiety related to their coursework. [13,14,15]

In addition, such dependency can make it into the trap of vicious cycle where in this case the academic drawbacks caused by the dependency can further intensify the dependency to the extent of it results in increased stress and negative consequences to the academic performance. [16,17,18]

The research demonstrated that demographic elements occasionally matter but social campus dynamics along with environmental elements fundamentally determine addiction patterns. [19,20] Personal background affects how individuals use the internet but the broader environmental aspects of college life together with online platform presence matter more in the development of internet dependency.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that that group counseling successfully decreases the level of internet addiction in college students. The numbers of people in addiction decreased dramatically after the targeted interventions were implemented. The powerful relationship between internet addiction exists with educational level and stream of study together with internet usage since these variables strongly influence online addiction among students. The demographics of age as well as gender together with socio-economic status and mental health backgrounds did not demonstrate substantial relationships to internet addiction scales. Evidence demonstrates there is a requirement to create risk-based intervention programs for effective internet addiction management.

Recommendation

Educational institutions should establish structured group counseling programs for effective internet addiction treatment. Public awareness programs need to specifically focus education on high-risk populations by studying their academic factors and behavioral patterns. More studies must examine supplementary elements that cause internet addiction to create specific treatment approaches.

Financial support

No, financial support.

Conflicts of Interest

No, conflicts of Interest.

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