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# Digital Risks and Youth Resilience: Evaluating Internet Addiction and Gender Impacts through the SDG Framework in India

**Amit Amit[1], Sanjay Kumar[2*]**

[1]Research Scholar, Department of Applied Psychology,
Guru Jambheshwar University of Science & Technology, Hisar.
[2]Associate Professor, Department of Applied Psychology,
Guru Jambheshwar University of Science & Technology, Hisar.
[1]Author, Email- asbbohemia@gmail.com [2*]Corresponding Author, email-sparmar@gjust.org

***Abstract***

***Background-*** *The growing incidence of internet addiction has generated worries about its psychological effects, especially its link to resilience. Understanding how excessive internet usage impacts resilience, particularly among adolescents. In light of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education), it is vital to investigate how excessive internet use affects youth development and well-being.* ***Aim-*** *The purpose of this study is to evaluate the relationship and gender difference between internet addiction and resilience, and to discover the predictors of internet addiction in teenagers.*

***Sample-*** *The study included 120 students from Hisar, Haryana, ranging in age from 16 to 19.*

***Method-*** *The study used a quantitative research approach, with Pearson's correlation (r) to measure the relationship between internet addiction (IA) and resilience, an independent samples t-test to investigate gender differences, and multiple regression analysis to find the predictors of IA.* ***Result-*** *The study found no substantial link (r = -.057) between internet addiction and resilience. However, there were significant gender disparities in both categories, with male adolescents scoring higher in internet addiction with (M = 37.93, SD = 12.248) and resilience with (M = 18.95, SD = 3.414) than female adolescents with (M = 31.12, SD = 13.640) on internet addiction and with (M= 17.08, SD = 3.230) on resilience. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis revealed that gender is a significant predictor of internet addiction with a 5.7% variance. Females had a much lower score than the males by roughly 6.65 units.*

***Conclusion-*** *The study emphasizes the impact of gender on IA and resilience, claiming that male teenagers are more vulnerable to IA while also being more resilient. These findings underline the importance of gender-sensitive solutions for managing adolescent's internet addiction. These findings add to the overall SDG agenda by promoting inclusive, egalitarian, and health-conscious education and behavioral interventions for youths.*

***Keywords:*** *Adolescents, Internet Addiction, Resilience, Student, Teenager.*

## INTRODUCTION

The internet is the most amazing invention of the modern digital age, a seamless addition to our everyday existence. It becomes an essential instrument for our current existence by acting as a fundamental platform for information, communication, entertainment, and education. With previously unheard-of possibilities for personal growth and development, this technological marvel has completely changed the way people communicate, study, and access resources (Peng et al., 2019). Several activities come under the domain of internet usage, such as employment of social networking sites, online shopping and gaming, searching for information pertaining to work, emailing, blogging, and visiting, downloading, and viewing websites that offer news, TV shows, and pornographic material. Online communication can foster interpersonal connections and positively affect socialization and self-esteem (Fumero et al., 2018). Excessive and obsessive internet use, commonly referred to as Internet Addiction (IA), has become a problem, particularly for young people (Peng et al., 2019). While Internet addiction can affect people of any age, teenagers are especially susceptible because of their developing brains and the psychological and social pressures they encounter. IA refers to the "inability to control one's use of

the internet, which leads to psychological, social, school, and work difficulties" (Jia et al., 2018). Compulsive and excessive internet use, which is seen as a type of technology addiction, encompasses a wide range of behavioral reactions marked by poor self-control, and psychological arousal, resulting in sleep deprivation, prolonged periods without food, and limited physical activity (Alavi et al., 2011). Additionally, studies have linked internet addiction to a higher risk of depression and insomnia as 15.5% of college students in the research admitted to being online addicts, and there was a strong correlation between internet addiction and sleeplessness and despair (Jain et al., 2020). Internet addiction has been linked to impulsivity, depression, mood disorders, and suicide in terms of mental health. Research has revealed that individuals with an internet addiction exhibit extensive impairments in white matter integrity and notable grey matter shrinkage in specific brain regions (Hidalgo et al., 2023).Despite the numerous negative consequences of internet addiction, the most alarming is perhaps the weakening of psychological resilience. Resilience is the capacity to recover from stress, hardship, failure, obstacles, or even tragedy. It is a learned talent that is especially important in the formative years of adolescence (Graber et al., 2015). Resilience can be described as the "ability of an individual to recover from a traumatic event or to remain psychologically robust when faced with an adverse event" (De Terte et al., 2014). When internet addiction erodes this resilience, people struggle more to handle life's setbacks, which could set off a chain reaction of unfavorable events (Graber et al., 2015). For instance, research has demonstrated that excessive internet use can increase symptoms of anxiety and depression, making it more difficult for people to recover from these diseases (Carli et al., 2016). Some research has emphasized the inverse relationship between online addiction and resilience, indicating that teenagers with greater internet addiction levels also tend to have lower resilience levels. For instance, a cross-sectional study by (Cao et al., 2022) involving high school students in China found that internet addiction was significantly negatively related to resilience, indicating that adolescents with higher internet addiction scores tended to have lower resilience scores, this association highlights the possibility that internet addiction could impair teenagers' ability to manage stress and hardship. Therefore it is essential to investigate the addiction of the internet and bounce back ability in teenagers. So this study seeks to determine the link and gender variations between internet addiction and resilience among Adolescents. As per research, Resilience functions as a buffering element against internet addiction, the higher the score in resilience among the participants, the lesser the score in internet addiction (Robertson et al., 2018). One study was conducted on 837 students in Korea to understand the mediating role of internet addiction in relation to resilience and depressive symptoms. The result found that internet addiction mediates the link between resilience and depressive symptoms (Mak et al., 2018). A study was done on 98 students to explore the relationship of internet addiction with stressful events and resilience levels, and results showed that 80% of students were moderately affected by IA and 19.4% were problematic users of the Internet, additionally, IA was negatively correlated with resilience but positively correlated with stress (Chakraborti et al., 2016).

In a study, resilience was emerged as a protective factor against internet addiction, but it was observed to have different effects on males and females. The moderation effect of resilience was significant only in females and not males (Nam et al., 2018). Another study demonstrates a negative relationship between resilience and IA (Cao et al., 2022). A study was conducted on 400 Egyptian University students and 289 students out of 400 were classified as internet addicts of various severity. Additionally, they found a significant negative correlation between resilience, internet addiction, and emotional intelligence (Abdelhamid et al., 2021). Another study demonstrates the negative but significant relationship between problematic internet use and resilience (Dinc & Topcu, 2021). A study was conducted on 100 undergraduate students and the result found that internet addiction and academic resilience have no significant relationship, but there is a noticeable difference in internet addiction between males and females. Additionally, the locality has no significant difference in academic resilience and internet addiction (Mahato et al., 2023).

**Theoretical background of internet addiction and resilience**

The Cognitive-Behavioral Theory posits that dysfunctional ideas and behaviors lead to internet addiction. It suggests that internet addiction is influenced by cognitive distortions and maladaptive coping strategies Cognitive distortions and negative reinforcement may be at the root of excessive internet use. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is effective in treating internet addiction by addressing these underlying cognitive and behavioral patterns (Young, 2007; Widyanto & Griffiths, 2006).

(Agnew, 1992) presented the General Strain Theory (GST) which states that individuals encounter strains in their lives, resulting in unpleasant emotions like anger, irritation, and worry. According to GST, people who are stressed may use the internet to escape or distract themselves from their unpleasant feelings. This escape method can become regular and addicting over time, continuing a cycle of relying on the Internet to cope with stress (Jun & Choi, 2015).

The Biopsychosocial model is a theory proposed by (George Engle, 1981). The concept suggests that internet addiction is induced by a combination of biological, psychological, and social causes. It emphasizes the need to consider not just the individual's behaviors and beliefs, but also their biological preference and social environment (Dodge & Pettit, 2003). The Problematic Behavior Model views internet addiction as a behavioral issue rather than a biological one (Jessor, 2013; Jessor et al., 2017). It emphasizes excessive internet use as a critical factor in addiction development, affected by behavioral patterns. Individuals may indulge in obsessive internet use, resulting in negative life repercussions. Addiction can emerge from maladaptive coping techniques, such as utilizing the internet to avoid reality or deal with stress. Framing addiction as a behavioral disorder emphasizes the importance of addressing both behavioral and psychological aspects. Interventions should focus on adjusting behaviors, improving coping methods, and promoting better online habits to reduce addiction risk (Tunney & Rooney, 2023).

**Objectives**

To study the relationship between internet addiction and resilience among adolescents.

To study the gender difference between internet addiction and resilience among adolescents.

To study the role of gender in internet addiction among adolescents.

**Hypothesis**

$H^1$ There will be no significant relationship between internet addiction and resilience among adolescents.

$H^2$ There will be no significant difference in gender between internet addiction and resilience among adolescents.

$H^3$ Gender will not be a significant predictor of internet addiction among adolescents.

**Method**

**Sample**

A total sample of 120 students was collected from the various locations of Hisar, Haryana. The age range of the sample was from 16 to 19 years. The data was collected through offline mode.

**Instruments**

**Self-Structured Profile:** An inventory was created to gather the participants' socio-demographic information, such as their age, gender, SES, background, school-type, family-type, and qualifications.

**Internet Addiction Test** (Kimberly Young., 1998): The test consists of 20 items, each assessed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. It categorizes internet usage into three groups: mild, moderate, and severe. Scores between 20 and 49 suggest average use, while scores from 50 to 79 indicate frequent problems with internet usage, Scores ranging from 80 to 100 signify pathological internet use. The reliability of the test is 0.85 and the validity of 0.90.

**Brief Resilience Scale:** The scale was developed by Smith et al. (2008) and consists of six items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Among these items, the first, third, and fifth statements are positive affirmations while the second, fourth, and sixth ones are negative. This structure enables the assessment of an individual's ability to rebound from stress. The scale demonstrates a reliability coefficient of 0.80, indicating its robustness in measuring resilience.

**Procedure**

Participants who gave consent were included in the research for the data collection. Each participant received a questionnaire, administered individually, ensuring privacy and confidentiality of their responses. Participants were informed that there are no right or wrong answers, encouraging them to respond honestly based on their perspectives and experiences. Confidentiality of participants' responses was maintained throughout the data collection process. Statistical analyses, such as Pearson correlation (Pearson r), independent sample T-test and Multiple Regression Analysis, were applied to the collected data to identify any significant relationships, gender differences, and predictors of IA.

**Result and discussion**

**Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the sample (N=120)**

| Variables | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Age | 18.01 | .874 |
| Gender | 1.65 | .479 |
| SES | 2.02 | .343 |
| Area | 1.38 | .488 |
| Education | 2.65 | .479 |
| School type | 1.66 | .476 |
| Family type | 1.56 | .499 |
| Game | 1.65 | .479 |

**Table 2 Sample Characteristics (N= 120)**

| Variables | | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age (years) | 16-17 | 35 | 29.2 |
| | 18-19 | 85 | 70.9 |
| Gender | Male | 42 | 35.0 |
| | Female | 78 | 65.0 |
| SES | High | 6 | 5.0 |
| | Medium | 106 | 88.3 |
| | Low | 8 | 6.7 |
| Area | Rural | 74 | 61.7 |
| | Urban | 46 | 38.3 |
| Education | $12^{th}$ | 42 | 35.0 |
| | Graduation | 77 | 65.0 |
| School Type | Government | 41 | 34.2 |
| | Private | 79 | 65.8 |
| Family Type | Joint | 53 | 44.2 |
| | Nuclear | 67 | 55.8 |
| Game | Indoor | 42 | 35.0 |
| | Outdoor | 78 | 65.0 |

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Table 3 Correlation among study variables (N=120)

| Variables | IA | M±SD |
|---|---|---|
| Resilience | -.057 | 17.76±3.408 |
| IA | 1 | 33.61±13.354 |

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows the correlation coefficient of -.057 indicating a negligible negative relationship between internet addiction and resilience. This suggests that variation in internet addiction minimally affects resilience, and vice versa. In statistical terms, the correlation is so weak that it denotes a lack of significant linear association between the variables. Hence the proposed hypothesis $H^1$ has been accepted.

**Table 4 shows the gender difference between internet addiction and resilience.**

| Variables | Male M±SD (N=42) | Female M±SD (N=78) | t | Df | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Internet Addiction | 37.93±12.248 | 31.12±13.640 | 2.702** | 118 | .008 |
| Resilience | 18.95±3.414 | 17.08±3.230 | 2.974** | 118 | .004 |

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Figure-1 Mean and SD of males and females on Internet addiction**

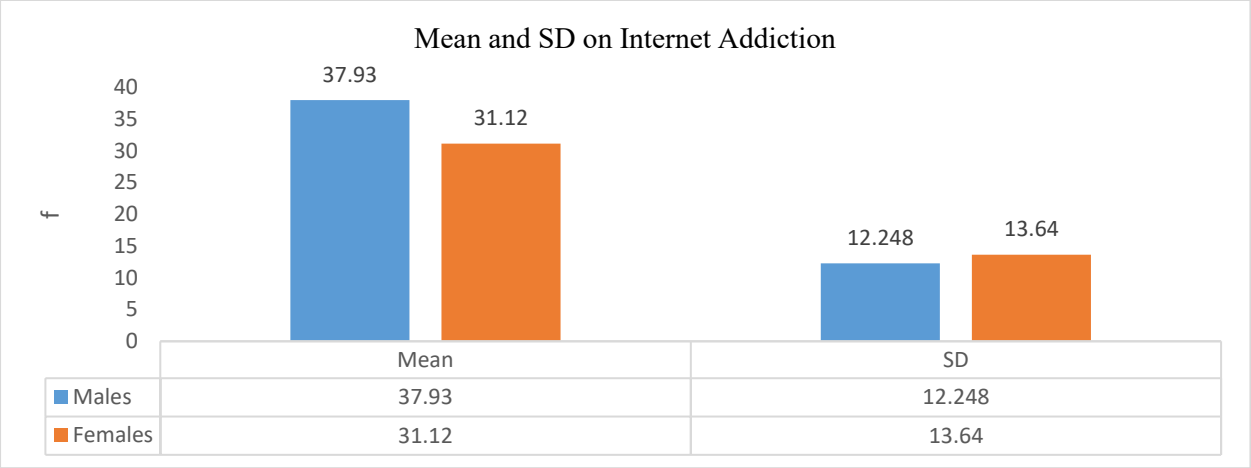
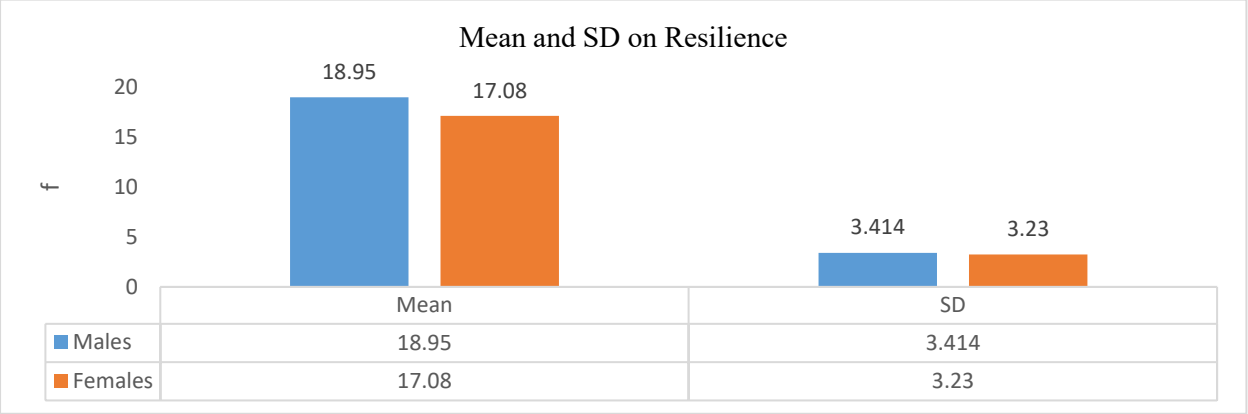



**Figure-2 Mean and SD of males and females on Resilience**



An independent samples t-test was applied to compare internet addiction and resilience among groups, and significant differences were found across the groups studied. The results revealed statistically significant differences in internet addiction (t-value=2.702, p-value=0.008) and resilience (t-value=2.974, p-value=0.004) between the groups, with a degree of freedom (DF) of 118. As the significance values for internet addiction and resilience were less than 0.05, hence the proposed hypothesis $H^2$ was rejected at a .05 level of significance. This indicates a significant variance in the means of the groups. Specifically, the findings revealed that males scored higher on both internet addiction and resilience than females, contradicting the original hypothesis.

**Table 5: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis**

| Predictor | $R^2$ | $R^2$Change | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | B | B Std. Error | β | | |
| **Constant** | | | 44.575 | 4.281 | | 10.411** | .000 |
| **Gender** | .057 | .057 | -6.647 | 2.493 | -.238 | -2.666** | .009 |

Note: a) Predictors: (Constant), Gender b) Dependent Variable: IA

Table 5 shows the results of a Multiple Linear Regression Analysis to identify the contributing factor for internet addiction. All variables, including age, gender, socio-economic status, area, education, schooling, family type, game, and resilience were included in the analysis. Surprisingly, only gender (β= -.238, p<0.01) emerged as a significant predictor of IA.

## DISCUSSION ABOUT THE RESULT

*Descriptive Statistics*

Table 1 indicates the mean and standard deviation of the sample, including the mean and SD of age, gender, area, education, game, family type, and school type. Table 2 shows the Sample Characteristics of (N=120) including frequency and percentage.

*Correlation Analysis*

Table 3 shows the weak negative or negligible correlation (r = -.057) between IA and resilience suggesting that resilience has a minimal effect on internet addiction or vice versa. In other words, the strength of the relationship is as weak as the values are -.057 which means there is insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis hence the proposed hypothesis has been accepted. This result aligns with a previous study on elementary school students indicating a negatively significant but weak correlation between resilience and internet addiction (Zhou et al., 2017).

Gender Differences

Table 4 illustrates gender differences in internet addiction and resilience. In terms of internet addiction, males had a mean score of 37.93 (SD = 12.248), higher than females with a mean score of 31.12 (SD = 13.640), with a statistically significant difference (t=2.702, df=118, p=0.008) indicating greater addiction in males. On the other hand, for resilience, males exhibited a mean score of 18.95 (SD = 3.414) whereas, females had a mean score of 17.08 (SD = 3.230), with a significant difference (t=2.974, df=118, p= 0.004) suggesting higher resilience levels in males. Thus the proposed null hypothesis was rejected, highlighting the gender variations in both internet addiction and resilience.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 5 Gender is a significant predictor of the IA. Females had a much lower score than the males by roughly 6.65 units. Although gender has a statistically significant effect, it only accounts for 5.7% of the variance, implying that other factors are likely to influence the outcome.

## CONCLUSION

This study defines the complex dynamics among internet addiction, resilience, and gender differences. Through our investigation of the potential link between internet addiction and resilience, the study found no significant correlation between IA and resilience. Moreover, our findings underscore competent gender variations in both internet addiction and resilience, males are more prone to internet addiction in comparison to females. Also on the level of resilience, males are more resilient than females. The findings highlight the negligible influence of internet addiction on resilience and vice versa. While resilience is recognized as an important factor in psychological well-being, its impact on mitigating internet addiction appears to be minimal in this study. Gender emerged as significant predictor of IA. To support mental health in the digital era, it will be more important than ever to comprehend and deal with the complexity of online addiction and resilience. These findings indicate that, while resilience is an important aspect in fostering psychological well-being, as emphasized in SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), its direct influence in reducing internet addiction may be limited in this situation. Importantly, gender appeared as a significant predictor of internet addiction, emphasizing the need for gender-responsive mental health interventions and inclusive educational frameworks that align with SDG 4 (Quality Education). Understanding and managing the complex dynamics of digital behavior is critical for the holistic development of kids. As digital environments grow, solutions that combine mental health awareness, digital literacy, and equitable access to support networks will be critical for advancing the SDGs and ensuring adolescent well-being in the digital age.

**Suggestions**

**Promote Digital Literacy (SDG 4.4)** - Implement educational programs to improve digital literacy, supporting individuals in developing a better connection with the internet and decreasing the risk of addiction.

**Emotional Intelligence Training (SDG 4.7, SDG 3.4)**- Incorporate emotional intelligence training into school curricula and businesses to provide individuals with the ability to properly regulate emotions, potentially minimizing the harmful impacts of internet addiction.

**Balanced Leisure Time (SDG 3.4)** - To prevent excessive internet usage, encourage a balance in leisure time spent online since studies demonstrate a link between increasing leisure hours online and internet addiction.

**Foster Supportive environments (SDG 3.5, SDG 5.c)** - Foster supportive situations in both the personal and professional realms to improve resilience. High emotional intelligence may protect against the negative impacts of internet addiction.

**Strengthening resilience factors (SDG 3.4, SDG 16.1) -** Resilience can be enhanced by having a strong support network be it family, or peer groups by providing a sense of belonging and emotional support. Feelings of hope, gratitude, and optimism can contribute to resilience even during difficult times. Self-regulation skills like mindfulness, self-control, and self-awareness also help strengthen resilience.

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