

Screening for Internet Addiction among Medical Students in a Saudi Community

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Abstract : Background: The internet is an exciting medium that is becoming an essential part of everyday life. Although the internet is fully observed in Saudi Arabia, young people may be vulnerable to problematic internet use, possibly leading to addiction. Aim of study: To explore the magnitude of internet addiction (IA) among medical students associated risk factors and its impact on students' academic achievement. Subjects and Methods: A cross sectional study was conducted in 2014 on 571 medical students (293 males and 278 females) at the College of Medicine, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia. Data Collection was done through using the Arabic version of the Compulsive Internet Use Scale and a checklist of demographic characteristics. Results: Age of participants ranged from 19 to 26 years (Mean+SD: 21.9+1.5 years). Internet access was available to 97.4% of students at home and to 80.2% of students at their mobile phones. The most frequently accessed websites by medical students were the social media (90.7%), scientific website (50.4%) and the news websites (31.3%). IA was mild in 47.8% of medical students while 5.8% had moderate IA. None of the students had severe IA. Prevalence of IA was significantly higher among female medical students ($p=0.002$), availability of internet at home ($p=0.022$), and availability of internet at the students' mobile phone ($p=0.041$). The mean General Point Average (GPA) was highest among students with mild IA ($4.0+0.6$), compared with $3.6+0.6$ among those with moderate addiction, and $3.9+0.6$ among those who did not show IA. Differences in mean GPA according to grade of IA were statistically significant ($P=0.001$). Conclusions: Prevalence of IA is high among medical students in Saudi Arabia. Risk factors for IA include female gender, availability of internet at home or at the mobile phone. IA has a significant impact on students' GPA. Periodic screening of medical students for IA and raising their awareness toward the possible risk of IA are recommended.

Keywords : internet addiction, medical students, risk factors, Saudi Arabia

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