

Effect of Internet Addiction on Dietary Behavior and Lifestyle Characteristics among University Students

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Abstract : Internet addiction, an emerging mental health disorder from last two decades, is manifested by the inability in the controlled use of internet leading to academics, social, physiological and/or psychological difficulties. The present study aimed to assess the levels of internet addiction among university students in Lahore and to explore the effects of internet addiction on their dietary behavior and lifestyle. It was an analytical cross-sectional study. Data was collected from October to December 2016 from students of four universities selected through two-stage sampling method. The numbers of participants were 500 and 13 questionnaires were rejected due to incomplete information. Levels of Internet Addiction (IA) were calculated using Young Internet Addiction Test (YIAT). Data was also collected on students' demographics, lifestyle factors and dietary behavior using self-reported questionnaire. Data was analyzed using SPSS (version 21). Chi-square test was applied to evaluate the relationship between variables. Results of the study revealed that 10% of the population had severe internet addiction while moderate Internet Addiction was present in 42%. High prevalence was found among males (11% vs. 8%), private sector university students ($p = 0.008$) and engineering students ($p = 0.000$). The lifestyle habits of internet addicts were significantly of poorer quality than normal users ($p = 0.05$). Internet addiction was found associated with lesser physically activity ($p = 0.025$), had shorter duration of physical activity ($p = 0.016$), had more disorganized sleep pattern ($p = 0.023$), had less duration of sleep ($p = 0.019$), reported being more tired and sleepy in class ($p = 0.033$) and spending more time on internet as compared to normal users. Severe and moderate internet addicts also found to be more overweight and obese than normal users ($p = 0.000$). The dietary behavior of internet addicts was significantly poorer than normal users. Internet addicts were found to skip breakfast more than a normal user ($p = 0.039$). Common reasons for meal skipping were lack of time and snacking between meals ($p = 0.000$). They also had increased meal size ($p = 0.05$) and habit of snacking while using the internet ($p = 0.027$). Fast food ($p = 0.016$) and fried items ($p = 0.05$) were most consumed snacks, while carbonated beverages ($p = 0.019$) were most consumed beverages among internet addicts. Internet Addicts were found to consume less than recommended daily servings of dairy ($p = 0.008$) and fruits ($p = 0.000$) and more servings of meat group ($p = 0.025$) than their no internet addict counterparts. In conclusion, in this study, it was demonstrated that internet addicts have unhealthy dietary behavior and inappropriate lifestyle habits. University students should be educated regarding the importance of balanced diet and healthy lifestyle, which are critical for effectual primary prevention of numerous chronic degenerative diseases. Furthermore, it is necessary to raise awareness concerning adverse effects of internet addiction among youth and their parents.

Keywords : dietary behavior, internet addiction, lifestyle, university students

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