Author's response to reviews

Title: Risk factors and psychosocial characteristics of problematic and potential problematic internet use among adolescents: A cross-sectional study

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Version: 3 Date: 6 May 2011

Author's response to reviews: see over
May 5th, 2011

Dear Prof Sigfusdottir,

Thank you for considering the manuscript entitled “Risk factors and psychosocial characteristics of potential problematic and problematic internet use among adolescents: A cross-sectional study” for publication in the Journal of BMC Public Health. We greatly appreciate the additional Reviewer Comments and hope that we have addressed each comment adequately. Please find below a detailed point-by-point response (in bullets and italics) to all aforementioned comments regarding the changes incorporated in the revised manuscript and marked in highlighted yellow color.

On behalf of my co-authors, I sincerely hope that you find the revisions made adequate and deem our revised work worthy of publication in your journal.

Sincerely,

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Reviewer's report
Title: Risk factors and psychosocial characteristics of problematic and potential problematic internet use among adolescents: A cross-sectional study
Version: 2 Date: 14 April 2011
Reviewer: Fenglin Cao
Reviewer's report:
The gender percentage of normal internet user was not correct. See Table 1, row 5, column 2, the 41.4% should be changed into 41.5%.

Thank you for noting this incorrect value. Please find that this correction has been made in Table 1.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest
Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.
Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing

Reviewer's report
Title: Risk factors and psychosocial characteristics of problematic and potential problematic internet use among adolescents: A cross-sectional study
Version: 2 Date: 14 April 2011
Reviewer: Lawrence Lam
Reviewer's report:
The authors have taken on board the conceptual issues relating to the assessment and diagnosis of “Internet Addiction” and have replaced the term with problematic Internet use.
However, in terms of the methodological issues particularly issue relating to the application of the appropriate statistical analytical technique according to the study design, it has not been addressed satisfactorily. The reason given by the authors for ignoring the clustering effect of the sample as:” the proximity of schools within the urban district of Athens” does not minimise the clustering effect. Given Internet use among adolescents is mainly for social networking and gaming, as suggested by literature as well as from the data of this study, it is highly likely that young people in the same class of the same school network and game with each other. It could also be appreciated from an “in-group” or the norming effect of the “sub-culture” within certain youth groupings. Hence, it is important to take the clustering effect into consideration. Should the study be properly planned with a stratified random cluster sampling technique with consultation of statistician, information on the sample unit (class) should have been collected. The same argument can also be applied to the issue of lack of consideration of other potential risk factors of problematic Internet use. Most of these potential risk factors are not psychiatric conditions and the collection of information on these factors should be rather straightforward. These factors should be considered during the planning phase in that case information on these variables could have been collected during the survey. There is a direct implication on the results obtained from this study. Without adjusting the effects of these potential risk factors, the results on the determinant identified from this study could not be confirmed conclusively. These short-comings should be discussed as limitations of the study.
Thank you for your very insightful points regarding this methodological issue. We do agree that the association between social networking, as well as interactive gaming, in relation to problematic internet use may be potentially affected by clustering effects. However, for the purposes of the present study, sample unit information was not collected in adequate detail so as to allow for cluster analyses. As a result, we have now described in detail both the limitations and implications of this methodological issue in the limitations of the study (Discussion section, paragraph 10, lines 7-18).

Issue 3 and 4 in the methodological comments should be considered together. The authors have combined the potential PIU and the PIU groups together into the maladaptive Internet Use (MIU) and have conducted analyses accordingly. However, the definition of the MIU should also be presented in the Method section otherwise readers would be confused and found it difficult to follow in the Results section. Moreover, since the two PIU groups have been combined, it is not necessary to conducted further analyses using the potential PIU and PIU separately. Information presented in the Tables should also contain only the normal users and MIU only.

Thank you for this comment. Please find that the definition of MIU has been included in the Methods section (Data collection, paragraph 2, lines 3-4). In addition, please find that Tables 1, 2, and 3 now include the study findings in relation to maladaptive internet use. With respect to the inclusion of the research findings regarding potential PIU and PIU, we would like to uphold that the presentation of these results may assist journal readers in further comprehending the differential associations between potential PIU, as well as PIU, in relation to the location of internet access, scopes of internet sites accessed, and psychosocial effects. It is in this manner that we hope that these findings may potentially contribute to further investigations in this research area aimed at examining the different mechanisms for potential PIU and consequent PIU development. Please note that this in depth information has been provided in addition to our findings relating to the comparison of adolescents with normal internet use and MIU. We sincerely hope that you may consider this particular presentation as a comprehensive investigation of the research hypotheses investigated.

Editor's comment:

"The key problem, as Dr. Lam points out, is that the authors are using a stratified cluster sample; most likely with a bigger standard error and broader confidence intervals than they get for a random sample. Students in each class/school are very likely to be more similar to each other, as internet use is a social hobby, than to students in other classes/schools. The more they are similar to each other, the bigger this problem is, - for this the sample would need to be larger than when using a random sample of students from a particular population. I recommend that we ask the authors whether they have information on from what class/school each participant in the study comes from. If they have that information, they can recalculate the standard error for a cluster sample, providing new confidence intervals. If they do not have that information, they need to clearly state in the limitations of the study that the fact that they are using a stratified cluster sample, may affect the standard error and confidence intervals, - so that the SE may be bigger than calculated and the CI’s broader. They also need to clearly state in the method section that they are using a stratified cluster sample," Thank you for your insightful comments. Please find that for the purposes of the present study sample unit information was not collected in adequate detail so as to allow for cluster analyses. Please find that we have now described in detail both the limitations and implications of this
methodological issue upon in the limitations of the study (Discussion section, paragraph 10, lines 7-18). In addition, we have also described in the limitations how the analyses conducted may have limited both the standard error and confidence intervals reported (Discussion section, paragraph 10, line 13-15). Finally, we have reported in the Methods section that a stratified cluster sample was used (Study design and study population, paragraph 2, lines 1-3).