Reviewer's report

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

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Reviewer: Lawrence Lam

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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.

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 conduct further analyses using the potential PIU and PIU separately. Information presented in the Tables should also contain only the normal users and MIU only.