Reviewer's report

Title: Personal characteristics related to the risk of adolescent Internet addiction: A survey in Shanghai, China

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Reviewer: Jianghong Liu

Reviewer's report:

I appreciate the opportunity to review the article, “Personal characteristics related to the risk of adolescent Internet addiction: A survey in Shanghai, China.” Please find a summary of my comments and concerns below.

Overall, this is an important topic. It is clear from the literature that excessive Internet use is a problem, particularly in parts of the Eastern world and increasingly so in the United States. Understanding personal characteristics related to the risk of adolescent Internet addiction could potentially help public health implication on prevention.

Introduction

Internet addiction is a potentially problematic behavioral problem. Adolescent Internet addiction (AIA) specifically has been under-researched, and the purpose of this paper is to provide prevalence data from 16 high schools in Shanghai, China. Demographic and individual predictive factors are also identified.

Although this appears to be an important potential public health problem worth of study, the introduction could be improved by providing a compelling conceptual foundation for demonstrating the need for this research. Specifically, more details are needed on the extent to which Internet addiction is a problem, and the identified consequences of Internet addiction, especially among youth. Why is there a need to focus specifically on adolescents (rather than college-age populations or adults)? What data are available that describe the impact of Internet addiction in youth in terms of psychological, emotional, economic, and/or educational outcomes (short-term and long-term)? Is Internet addiction among teen-agers longitudinally associated with important outcomes? This paper would be significantly strengthened if the authors could provide a more thorough description of Internet addiction as a problematic behavior and why, specifically, its identification in adolescents is needed.

Methodology

Data were collected from 5, 122 adolescents through self-report questionnaire on Internet use, psychological characteristics, and demographic variables. Multiple regression and logistic regression were use to develop predictor models. A few questions:

• The age rang was 11.3-20.4. 20 years old seems to be quite rare for a high
school student. Wonder how many of them or percentage are at this age? Is “20 years old” related to their academic failure (for example, they stayed another year for the same grade) because of AIA? Further analysis or explanation is needed.

- The authors need to justify the reliability of self-reported academic achievement which is an important variable. The authors also need to indicate in the manuscript that data on academic achievement was self-reported (although it can be seen in the appendix).

- The questionnaires cover many social demographic variables, please justify why only those indicated in the tables were selected.

Results and Discussion

Overall, the authors’ reported findings are very interesting and have potential value in better understanding this behavioral disturbance. Findings related to demographics aren’t particularly surprising, but the findings related to academic achievement may be a potentially useful place to focus, especially in terms of risk prevention strategies and in terms of understanding implications.

The authors state that the prevalence from the current study (8.8%) is “relatively high”, but this does not seem to be the case in comparison to the data they provide. Other studies in China report prevalence rates of 8.1%, 12.2%, and 2.4%. Hong Kong rates are reported at 6.7%, while in Italy and Greece, the authors report rates of 1.5-10%; 5.4%; and 1.5%. Based on this, it seems more accurate to describe the current findings of 8.8% as expected, given the ranges from other studies in China. It may be that Internet addiction is more prevalent in China than in other countries, but the results from this study do not seem inconsistent with other Chinese studies of AIA. Please explain.

The authors’ suggestion that the link between AIA and greater economic spending may be due to peer influence also seems weak. Furthermore, while factors such as time spent online, academic achievement, and self-esteem have obvious value and importance, it is unclear why the amount of monthly spending was studied as a risk factor. In fact, the authors note that few studies of AIA have studied this as a risk factor, and it may be because its value and importance in understanding outcomes is overall weak. This paper would be strengthened by a heavier focus on factors related to risk identification and the development of prevention strategies (e.g., academic achievement; personality characteristics; family/home life characteristics; number of hours spent online and types of activities conducted online [chatting vs. gaming vs. education]). This discussion could then dovetail into further discussion of prevention strategies and how schools and families can work together to reduce risk and decrease excessive Internet use.

It seems important that the authors better acknowledge the fact that Internet addiction is a somewhat controversial condition, given that it is not considered a diagnosable psychiatric disorder as per the current edition of the Diagnostic and
Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV). The limitation of self-reported academic achievement on reliability should be acknowledged.

Finally, it is suggested that the manuscript undergo thorough editing for grammatical and typographical errors, as they are present throughout the paper and are somewhat distracting.