Examining Internet Addiction among International College Students in the United States: Acculturative Stress, Gender, Age and Length of Stay

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Background

Over the past 20 years, Internet addiction (IA) has become a campus health issue that cannot be ignored in the United Stated and other countries in the world (Anderson, 2001; Cardak, 2013; Carlisle et al, 2016; Kendell, 2009). It is estimated that 71% of 18-24 years old would qualify as being addicted to the Internet, and prevalence rates of IA are as high as 8.2% in the general population (Gaille, 2017; Weinstein & Lejue, 2010). To date, IA on college campuses is a growing concern as more and more studies are revealing (Chai et al., 2012; Ostovar et al., 2016). Research has indicated that college students with IA are likely to experience depression (Irene et al., 2017; Ostovar et al., 2016), anxiety (Ostovar et al., 2016), loneliness (Zeitha, 2019), and poor physical health such as vision problem, weight gain or loss (Gregory, 2019). Of college students, international students as a racial and cultural minority group, appear to be more at-risk of IA because their acculturation experiences entail adjustment difficulties and stress related to the excessive Internet use (Chai et al., 2012; Hirai et al., 2015; Ye, 2005). Given the prevalence and complexities of IA, it is imperative to identify the factors implicated in the IA so that counselors could more effectively target intervention to reduce the likelihood of the occurrence of IA. In the current study, we therefore examined the relationships between acculturative stress, gender, age, and length of stay among international college students. The findings from this study are intended to expand the existing literature on IA of international college students and its correlates.

Definition of Internet Addiction

Internet addiction (IA) was first proposed by Young (1998), referred to as problematic Internet use, computer addicts, Internet use disorder, or excessive Internet use (Capan, 2002; van Rossum & Prause, 2014; Young, 1996). Conceptualizations of IA have adhered to two distinct explanations: (a) it is a broad term that covers a wide variety of behavioral and impulse-control problems (Young, 1999), and (b) “many of these excessive users are not ‘Internet addicts’ but just use the Internet excessively as a medium to fuel other addictions” (Griffiths, 2000, p.416). Although IA has not been included in the spectrum of addictive disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5) or the International Classification of Diseases Tenth Edition (ICD-10), there is a rapid increasing concern with respect to its risk factors (Choi et al., 2015; Hyun et al., 2015).

Internet Addiction Symptoms

- Negative effects on your school or job performance
- Reduced involvement with your family or friends
- Loss of interest in other hobbies or pursuits
- Feelings of anxiety or depression when you’re away from your computer
- When not on your computer, you spend most of your time thinking about getting back to it
- Angry or defensive reaction when someone comments on your behavior
- Taking steps to hide the extent of your computer/Internet use

People with IAD may spend excessive amounts of time engaged in the following activities online:
- Gaming
- Gambling
- Shopping for merchandise
- “Shopping” for relationships on dating sites
- Social media

Understanding Internet Addiction

Our Study Participants

Of the 93 participants, 63 (67.7%) were male, 28 (30.1%) were female, and 2 (2.2%) were unknown. Ages ranged from 22 to 40 years old ($M = 28.62$, $SD = 3.69$). Regarding race/ethnicity, eight (8.6%) were Caucasian, five (5.4%) were African American, 63 (67.7%) were Asian, and 12 (12.9%) were biracial. 38 (40.9%) were undergraduate and 55 (59.1%) were master’s students. Participants were from a total of 27 countries. The top three countries were India ($n = 21$), China ($n = 9$), and Sri Lanka ($n = 6$).

Predictors Model 1 Model 2 Model 3
Age .35 .44 .46
Gender .003** .004** .002**
Length of stay .54 .51 .5
Acculturative stress .488
Discrimination .927
Hate .854
Fear .853
Cultural shock .003**
Guilt .852

References

