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Internet Addiction Among Adolescents in Light of the COVID-19 Crisis: A Clinical Study of Some Cases

Abstract

Our study addresses the issue of Internet addiction among adolescents in light of the COVID-19 crisis — a clinical study of some cases. It aimed to reveal that adolescents' excessive use of the Internet leads to addiction, to examine the level of addiction through the results of the applied scale, and to identify some variables responsible for it. The main motivation behind choosing this study was the scientific curiosity to explore the negative effects of the conditions imposed by the current global health crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus. The first hypothesis of the study stated that the level of Internet addiction among adolescents in light of the COVID-19 crisis is high. The second hypothesis stated that the level of Internet addiction among adolescents in light of the COVID-19 crisis varies according to the educational level of the parents. The approach used in this study is the clinical approach, which is appropriate and fulfills the research objectives. The sample consisted of two male cases selected intentionally. The study relied on a semi-directed clinical interview and applied the *Internet Addiction Test (IAT)* by Kimberly Young. The results showed that the level of Internet addiction among adolescents during the quarantine period due to the COVID-19 pandemic was high, and it did not differ according to the parents' educational level.

Keywords: COVID-19, epidemic, addiction, internet, adolescents

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COVID-19 böhranı şəraitində yeniyetmələrdə internet asılılığı: bəzi halların klinik araşdırması

Xülasə

Tədqiqatımız COVID-19 böhranı işığında yeniyetmələr arasında internet asılılığı məsələsinə – bəzi halların klinik tədqiqatına toxunur. Məqsəd yeniyetmələrin internetdən həddindən artıq istifadəsinin asılılığa səbəb olduğunu aşkar etmək, tətbiq olunan şkalanın nəticələri vasitəsilə asılılıq səviyyəsini araşdırmaq və buna görə məsul olan bəzi dəyişənləri müəyyən etmək idi. Bu tədqiqatı seçməyin əsas motivasiyası COVID-19 virusunun yaratdığı mövcud qlobal səhiyyə böhranının mənfi təsirlərini araşdırmaq üçün elmi maraq idi. Tədqiqatın ilk hipotezində COVID-19 böhranı işığında yeniyetmələr arasında internet asılılığı səviyyəsini yüksək olduğu bildirilirdi. İkinci fərziyyədə bildirilirdi ki, COVID-19 böhranı fonunda yeniyetmələr arasında internet asılılığı səviyyəsi valideynlərin təhsil səviyyəsinə görə dəyişir. Nümunə qəsdən seçilmiş iki kişi halından ibarət idi. Tədqiqat yarım yönlü klinik müsahibəyə əsaslanaraq Kimberli Yanq tərəfindən hazırlanmış *İnternet Asılılığı Testini (IAT)* tətbiq etmişdir. Nəticələr göstərdi ki, COVID-19 pandemiyası səbəbindən karantin dövründə yeniyetmələr arasında internet asılılığı səviyyəsi yüksək olub və valideynlərin təhsil səviyyəsinə görə fərqlənməyib.

Açar sözlər: COVID-19, epidemiyə, asılılıq, internet, yeniyetmələr

Introduction

The world today is experiencing a global health pandemic unprecedented in human history. In an era of spreading epidemics and viruses, during crises that require social distancing, the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic have gone beyond the field of health to include all areas such as the economy, politics, education, and the psychological and social spheres.

In the age of rapid digital transformation, where scientific discoveries and technological advances accelerate, it is well known that the Internet has provided many services to its users across specializations, interests, needs, and ages. Its importance in saving time, effort, and cost for researchers, students, and the general public is evident, as it allows access to sources at any time and within a short period, at no cost other than the cost of network connection. Despite the benefits of the Internet, the problem of optimal use remains, especially when it is consumed excessively to the point of addiction, which may hinder personal, family, and social life. The results of some studies confirm this, such as the study by Heba Bahi Al-Din Rabie (2003), *Addiction to the International Information and Communication Network (Internet) in Light of Some Variables*, which aimed to determine whether excessive Internet use leads to addiction and identify the conditions and variables responsible for it; and the study by Al-Homsi (2009), *Internet Addiction Among Youth and Its Relationship with Social Communication Skills: A Field Study on a Sample of Damascus University Students*, which aimed to highlight the phenomenon of Internet addiction and its relation to social communication skills. The study found a correlation between Internet addiction and social communication skills among the studied sample.

Research

This issue has become more pressing among youth, particularly in light of social distancing and movement restrictions as preventive measures to curb the spread of Covid-19. Our interest was drawn by the daily struggles of young people to adapt to the current situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which imposed restrictions on movement to prevent the spread of the virus. Its prolonged duration has shaken individuals' and society's psychological and social stability. It has become clear that adolescents' Internet use has significantly increased recently, prompting us to conduct this study on Internet addiction among adolescents to reveal the level of addiction and the role of certain variables, through a clinical study of some cases.

Based on this, we raise the following questions:

- Is the level of Internet addiction among adolescents in light of the Covid-19 crisis high?
- Does the level of Internet addiction among adolescents in light of the Covid-19 crisis differ according to the parents' educational level?

1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

1.1 Study Hypotheses

- **First hypothesis:** The level of Internet addiction among adolescents in light of the Covid-19 crisis is high.
- **Second hypothesis:** The level of Internet addiction among adolescents in light of the Covid-19 crisis varies according to the parents' educational level.

1.2 Importance of the Study

The importance of this study lies in shedding light on the negative effects of the conditions imposed by the current global health crisis due to the Covid-19 virus. It also draws its importance from the significance of the adolescent age group as a large and vital segment of society.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The current study aims to:

- Reveal that excessive Internet use leads adolescents to addiction.
- Identify some variables responsible for Internet addiction.
- Determine whether the level of Internet addiction differs according to parents' educational level.

1.4 Definition of Study Terms

- **Covid-19:** According to the World Health Organization, it is a virus discovered in 2019 from the coronavirus family. There was no prior knowledge of this new virus before its outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. Infection with Covid-19 is highly contagious and dangerous and has caused a global health pandemic.

- **Electronic Addiction:** A psychological and physical condition resulting from excessive Internet and digital platform use, characterized by various compulsive behavioral responses and an irresistible urge to engage. The level of addiction is identified through responses on the applied addiction scale according to a defined range.

1.5 Previous Studies

We will present a set of Arabic and foreign studies addressing variables related to the research topic:

- **Study by Khaled Al-Ammar (2014):** *Addiction to the Information Network (Internet) and Its Relationship with Some Variables among Students of the University of Damascus – Daraa Branch.*

The study aimed to determine Internet addiction among university students in light of variables such as gender, specialization, academic achievement, economic status, and number of Internet hours. The sample consisted of 674 male and female students. The study used a newly designed Internet addiction scale and found no significant relationship between Internet addiction and economic status or gender, but some differences appeared between arts students and those in education, law, science, and economics.

- **Study by Safa Amina (2016):** *Effects of Using Modern Technologies on Algerian Families – The Algerian Family as a Model.*

The study examined the impact of Internet use among adolescents on psychological, social, moral, and health aspects using a descriptive analytical approach on a sample of 200 middle school students from Oum El Bouaghi aged 13–15 years. Results indicated differences in the effects based on gender, duration, and frequency of use.

- **Study by Saba Muneer Hussein Bsheesh (2018):** *Internet Addiction and Its Relationship with Depression and Psychological Loneliness among University Students in Gaza.*

The study found statistically significant positive correlations between Internet addiction, depression, and loneliness among 500 university students.

- **Article by Boualem Ghebshi (2020):** *Coronavirus: What Are the Psychological Effects of Quarantine and How Can They Be Avoided?*

The article noted that quarantine imposed worldwide has caused psychological issues like anxiety and stress, especially for people in fragile mental states.

- **Study by G. Ferraro (2003):** *Internet Addiction Disorder.*

Conducted on 236 Italian participants, it revealed that young users were more prone to Internet addiction and had lower social quality of life.

- **Study by Azhar (2014):** *The Relationship Between Internet Addiction and Anxiety Among Students of Sargodha University.*

Conducted on 300 university students, the study found a positive correlation between Internet addiction and anxiety levels.

- **Article from Deutsche Welle (2020):** *Social Media: A Double-Edged Sword in the Age of Corona.*

It explained that with lockdowns and remote work, social media became both a tool for connection and a source of anxiety and misinformation.

1.6 Commentary on Previous Studies

- **Regarding environment and study location:**

Previous studies varied; some were conducted locally (e.g., Safa Amina, 2016), others in different Arab and foreign countries. Studies on Covid-19 included both Western and Arab contexts, motivating the need for a local Algerian study.

- **Regarding methodology:**

Most previous studies used the descriptive method, while the current study adopted a *clinical approach* using the *case study technique*.

- **Regarding objectives:**

Previous studies either focused on Internet addiction as an independent variable or examined its relationship with other issues such as depression and loneliness (e.g., Bsheesh, 2018). The current study aligns with these by linking Internet addiction to the Covid-19 context.

- **Regarding sample:**

Most previous studies focused on university students, except for Safa Amina's study (2016) on middle school students. The present study differs by focusing specifically on *adolescents*.

- **Regarding research tools:**

Regarding the Tools Used in Previous Studies

The tools used in previous studies were diverse. Some relied on standardized scales, while others developed their own instruments and questionnaires — such as the study by **Asafa Amina (2016)**.

In the present study, a **semi-structured clinical interview** was used, along with the **Internet Addiction Scale** from **Sabrina Hamdi's study (2014)**.

In light of the reviewed previous studies, it can be concluded that they varied in the variables addressed. Some focused on a single variable — as in **Greenfield's (1998)** study on Internet addiction — while others, including the current one, examined two variables.

The objectives of these studies also differed: some aimed to reveal relationships between variables, while others sought to identify differences.

As for the **COVID-19 variable**, most studies focused on its effects, ways of coping with the pandemic, and preventive measures.

Hence, the significance of the current study lies in its **uniqueness**, as it combines two highly important variables — particularly relevant to current global circumstances under the spread of the novel coronavirus. This reflects the study's **timeliness and contemporary relevance**. Furthermore, the research was conducted in a **local context**, whereas most prior studies were based in **different environments**.

2. Theoretical Framework of the Study

2.1 Definition of Internet Addiction

Addiction (Linguistically):

It means habituation or the inability to abstain. One says, “a person is addicted to something” when he cannot easily refrain from it.

Addiction (Terminologically):

It is a multi-faceted concept with numerous theoretical interpretations. In the *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Psychoanalysis*, it is defined as:

“The continued engagement in the use of certain substances or in specific activities over a long period for the purpose of achieving euphoria, which leads to psychological or physical dependence, or both.” (Ismaili, 2011, p. 35).

Internet (Linguistically):

The term *Internet* is short for *International Network*, meaning the global information network.

Internet (Terminologically):

It is a global network that interconnects multiple smaller networks across countries via telephone lines and satellites, enabling the exchange of information through central computers known as **servers**, which store essential data and control the network as a whole (Bashir, 2007, p. 45).

The Internet's main language is **English**, and while access appears free, the real cost lies in **service provision** (‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sha‘ir, 2015, p. 24).

Internet Addiction (IAD):

Also called *pathological Internet use*, this disorder refers to **excessive Internet use** that interferes with daily life. Initially used to describe **substance dependence**, the concept has been extended to **behavioral dependence** on the Internet.

As the Internet has evolved and spread, this problem has grown — particularly among **adolescents (12–17 years)** and **young adults (18–29 years)**, who are the most exposed to the risks of excessive Internet use (Hussein, 2018, p. 2).

Internet addiction is a **disorder** affecting certain individuals and may develop into a **psychological illness** when accompanied by severe depression and social isolation.

(<https://www.hopeeg.com/blog/show/electronic-addiction>)

The **American Psychiatric Association (APA)** has included Internet use among the recognized forms of addiction, defining it as:

“A compulsive psychological need resulting from dissatisfaction with Internet use, accompanied by several symptoms.” (Munir, 2018, p. 19).

In summary, Internet addiction represents a **compulsive need** arising from an organism’s interaction with a stimulus or behavior, producing behavioral responses such as a persistent or periodic urge to engage, either to achieve psychological euphoria or to avoid discomfort from abstinence.

Although distinct from substance or alcohol addiction, Internet addiction may lead to a **loss of control** affecting an individual’s ordinary life, relationships, and social integration.

2.2 Symptoms of Internet Addiction

Symptoms of digital or Internet addiction can be summarized as follows:

- Family members and close relations complain about prolonged Internet use.
- Neglect of academic, family, marital, or professional responsibilities.
- Staying up late, insomnia, fatigue, and tension when disconnected, with anticipation for the next session.
- Inability to regulate Internet use; physical complaints due to long sitting hours; tendency toward isolation and reduced social interaction (Khaled Al-‘Ammar, 2014, p. 412).

Physical symptoms include: back pain, chronic headaches, weight gain or loss, sleep disorders, and blurred vision.

Psychological symptoms include: guilt, anxiety, dishonesty, social isolation, impulsivity, depression, mood swings, loss of time awareness, and financial problems due to online gambling (Hope Health Center, n.d.).

2.3 Causes of Internet Addiction

The main factors that lead users to Internet addiction include:

- Weak coping skills for daily stress and poor problem-solving abilities.
- Lack of hobbies to fill free time.
- Failure to build healthy social relationships due to shyness or introversion.
- Escaping reality through imaginary online relationships lacking intimacy.
- Emotional deprivation and seeking love and attention online.
- Psychological alienation and escape from restrictive social norms, leading to emotional immaturity and psychological stagnation (Amal Al-Zaydi, 2014, p. 14).

Some individuals become addicted to websites to satisfy inner needs such as boredom, loneliness, lack of emotional support, or shyness in face-to-face communication — all of which increase vulnerability to digital obsession and dopamine-related dependence (Hope Health Center, n.d.).

2.4 Negative Effects of Internet Addiction

Despite its many benefits, the Internet has harmful consequences for those who use it excessively, including:

- Wasting significant time, sometimes leading to family disintegration.
- Exposure to pornographic content that threatens youth, especially adolescents.
- Desire for isolation, laziness, and religious neglect.
- Physical health risks.

(<https://www.hopeeg.com/services/other-addictions/internet-addiction>)

Electronic addiction has serious **psychological and physical complications**, linked to various mental illnesses and negative behaviors — such as impaired social communication, **depression, anxiety, social withdrawal**, and **poor time management (Hope Health Center, n.d.)**.

Other negative effects include:

Psychological: loss of psychological security due to overattachment, academic problems such as truancy and poor motivation, and psychological issues like anxiety, hypersensitivity, and irresponsibility.

Physical: eating disorders, eye strain, obesity, lethargy, heart and brain diseases, chronic headaches, and sleep disturbances.

Social and family-related: withdrawal from social interaction, spending excessive time online at the expense of family obligations, leading to weakened family ties (Bashir, 2007, p. 87).

2.5 Treatment of Internet Addiction

Treatment involves changing Internet usage patterns and eliminating negative dependency, especially among adolescents and children, through:

- **Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT):** structured sessions in addiction treatment clinics aimed at modifying behavioral and lifestyle patterns.

- **Pharmacological therapy:** rarely used, but prescribed in cases involving mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, or obsessive-compulsive disorder, to reduce Internet dependency.

(<https://www.hopeeg.com/blog/show/electronic-addiction>)

In sum, managing Internet addiction requires several factors. The common denominator in all addictions is **escape from negative emotions, life pressures, and loss of control**. Thus, treatment must start by **changing thought patterns**, organizing time, setting clear online goals, and maintaining social contact to avoid isolation.

2.6 The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The novel coronavirus appeared in **Wuhan** in 2019. It belongs to the large **coronavirus family**, officially named **COVID-19** by the **World Health Organization** on **January 12, 2020**. On **February 12, 2020**, the **International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses** officially designated it as **SARS-CoV-2**, confirming that it belongs to the same group as the virus responsible for **SARS**.

Infection with COVID-19 causes **viral pneumonia**. Based on epidemiological studies, the incubation period ranges from **1 to 14 days**, with symptoms typically appearing between **3 and 7 days**.

The main symptoms include **fever, cough, and severe fatigue**. Some patients are asymptomatic, while severe cases may develop **shortness of breath, low blood oxygen, bleeding and coagulation disorders**, and **multi-organ failure** (Zarif, 2020, pp. 9–10).

Prevention measures include:

- Avoiding leaving home except when necessary.
- Limiting presence in crowded or poorly ventilated areas.
- Wearing medical or KN95/N95 masks in public.
- Maintaining proper hand hygiene.
- Ensuring adequate ventilation, not sharing towels, and exposing clothes and bedding to sunlight (Zarif, 2020, p. 11).

According to what is circulated on television channels, newspaper pages, social media sites, and other means of communication, some other uncommon symptoms may appear in a small percentage of patients, and some of them may recover from the disease without resorting to hospitals or healthcare. Furthermore, some individuals may carry the virus without showing apparent symptoms, especially young people.

3- The Methodological Framework of the Study:

3-1- The Research Method:

In every scientific study, the researcher selects a method that suits the nature of the research. In our study, given the nature of the problem under investigation, we found that the *clinical method*

using the case study approach is the most appropriate for our research, as it examines the individual as an integrated and unique unit that differs from others.

“D.Lagache” (1949) defines it as the clinical approach that studies the individual in his uniqueness through his life history by observation and the search for meanings and origins (actions and conflicts), as well as ways of resolving conflicts without focusing on specific symptoms. However, it is necessary to understand the structure, formation, and contexts of these symptoms, the way the individual perceives them, and his behavior toward certain situations, as it reveals the conflicts that drive them and the individual’s attempts to overcome them (Fernandez & Pedinielli, 2006, p. 42).

Thus, the method followed in the current study is the *clinical method*, which is suitable and fulfills the purposes of the research, especially under the current circumstances. It focuses on studying the individual within a problematic situation that requires investigation and interpretation, relating to his psychological course, which results in behavioral phenomena, as in our study on *Internet addiction among youth during the COVID-19 crisis*.

3-2- Study Sample:

The study sample consisted of two male cases selected intentionally to meet the required criteria: being adolescents and exhibiting excessive Internet use.

3-3- Research Tools:

Every researcher seeks to collect the necessary information and data for his study using various means. In our research, we relied on the *semi-structured clinical interview* and used the *Internet Addiction Test (I.A.T)* developed by Kimberly Young.

3-3-1- The Semi-Structured Clinical Interview:

During the semi-structured clinical interview, the clinician guides the interviewee at the appropriate times, keeping him focused on facts relevant to the topic of discussion. Generally, the interviewer avoids interfering too much, allowing the subject to express his personal experience by directing the conversation toward specific topics (Atouta, 2018, p. 27).

We chose this type of interview because it best serves the objectives of our research, as it gives the interviewee some freedom to avoid making it feel like an interrogation. At the same time, preparing a flexible interview guide allows us to intervene occasionally so that the participant does not perceive it as a mere conversation space.

The interview guide consisted of three main axes:

- The **first axis** was devoted to collecting personal data about the case.
- The **second axis** focused on obtaining the participant’s reflections on Internet use.
- The **third axis** included questions about how the participant used the Internet before and after the emergence of COVID-19 under home confinement. This briefly summarizes the contents of the axes in the interview guide. The content of these semi-structured clinical interviews was analyzed with the help of *Kimberly Young’s Internet Addiction Test (I.A.T)*.

3-3-2- Kimberly Young’s Internet Addiction Test (I.A.T):

This scale consists of 20 items related to Internet use, such as psychological dependency, compulsive behavior, withdrawal effects, and their relation to sleep disorders, family problems, poor time management, etc. This test is available on several websites discussing Internet addiction, including the official site supervised by Kimberly Young. It helps determine an individual’s level of Internet addiction. It has been translated from English into Arabic in several references and is suitable for all age groups. The test includes the following response options: *Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Frequently, Always*. When applying the Internet Addiction Test, participants respond to the questions based on their Internet use, whether excessive or normal, using the following scoring system:

- Never = 1
- Rarely = 2
- Sometimes = 3
- Often = 4
- Frequently = 5
- Always = 6

After summing the total score of the 20 questions, the higher the total, the higher the level of Internet addiction, as follows:

- **20–49 points:** Average Internet use.
- **50–79 points:** Occasional or frequent excessive Internet use that causes some problems in personal or professional life; the participant should consider its impact.
- **80–100 points:** Excessive Internet use causing many problems; the participant should recognize its negative effects and seek solutions. (Hamdi, 2014, pp. 135–150).

4- Presentation and Analysis of the Cases:

4-1- Case 1 (S):

4-1-1- Personal Data:

Gender: Male

Age: 17 years

Educational level: 2nd year secondary school

Marital status of parents: Both alive and together

Economic status: Comfortable

Father's occupation and education: Retired secondary school teacher

Mother's occupation and education: Housewife, intermediate education

Number of siblings: 4 (subject is the second child)

4-1-2- Summary of Interviews with the First Case:

The case is a 17-year-old adolescent, repeating the second year of secondary school, living with both parents and three siblings (two brothers and one sister). The family's economic level is comfortable. The interview proceeded smoothly, and the participant was cooperative and enthusiastic, as he had been using the Internet for a long time — “since childhood,” according to him (“I’ve been using it since I was little”). His sister, older than him, introduced him to it, initially for study and entertainment purposes (“My sister used to use it, and I’d use it with her — for homework or games”).

He stated that he spends long hours on the Internet from morning until night (“I always use it except when I sleep... even when I wake up, I eat with the phone in my hand”). He mainly uses it at home, sometimes with friends, or previously in Internet cafés. He uses it individually or with others, especially for multiplayer games. His favorite sites are “Facebook first, then Instagram, and YouTube — basically all of them.”

Regarding his relationship with family and friends, he admitted that Internet use caused family conflicts (“My mom argues with me all day long”), and he sometimes uses the Internet secretly, even lying to his parents (“I use it in secret, and when my dad catches me, I lie to him...”). He acknowledged that Internet use has both benefits and harms — useful for studying but time-wasting and reducing sleep and social interaction (“When I use it for studying, it’s good, but I waste time — I don’t sleep or go out”).

He admitted that the COVID-19 pandemic worsened things: “With the lockdown, day became night and night became day... my dad hides the modem, and I connect to the neighbors’ Wi-Fi.”

He reported anxiety, anger, and academic decline (“I’ve become nervous and angry... I used to be an excellent student but now I repeat grades”). When deprived of Internet access, he feels anxious (“When it cuts off, I get upset... I even watch offline videos to compensate”).

Before COVID-19, his use was moderate (“Before COVID, I didn’t use it much — I studied and slept early... now it’s constant”). The lockdown increased his usage (“We were stuck at home for eight months — what else could I do?”).

He admitted that Internet use helps him forget his worries (“It makes me forget everything, especially with school suspended”).

When asked about self-satisfaction, he expressed guilt (“I’m not happy with myself, I want to change but can’t... I tell my family I’m watching educational videos to justify it”).

4-1-3- Analysis of the Interviews with the First Case:

The case shows an understanding relationship with his father but tension with his mother, who constantly monitors his studies. His excessive Internet use caused continuous family conflicts (“Mom

argues with me all day”), a key symptom of Internet addiction. He often uses the Internet secretly and lies to avoid parental disapproval.

His addiction intensified during the COVID-19 lockdown, which increased isolation, boredom, and anxiety. This led to behavioral, psychological, and physical problems — insomnia, loss of appetite, irritability, and poor academic performance.

4-1-4- Results of the Internet Addiction Test for Case 1:

The test was conducted smoothly, and the participant cooperated fully. It took about 15 minutes. His score was **108**, exceeding the 80–100 range, indicating a *high level of Internet addiction*.

4-1-5- General Analysis of Case 1:

Based on the semi-structured interviews and the Internet Addiction Test results, the case shows clear signs of *severe Internet addiction* with psychological and social consequences. He experiences anxiety, tension, isolation, family conflict, and academic decline. His overuse intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic due to confinement and lack of alternative activities.

The symptoms observed include:

- Family complaints about long Internet use
- Neglect of schoolwork
- Insomnia and fatigue
- Irritability when disconnected
- Strong craving for online presence
- Inability to control usage
- Physical complaints from prolonged sitting
- Social withdrawal and isolation

All these indicators confirm that the case is addicted to Internet use.

4-2- The Second Case (M):

4-2-1- Personal Information of the Second Case:

Gender: Male, age: 15 years, educational level: first year of secondary school, family status: both parents alive and married, economic status: good, father’s occupation and educational level: retired (formerly a high school teacher), mother’s occupation and educational level: primary school principal, number of siblings: three, and he is the fourth, birth order: third.

4-2-2- Summary of the Interviews with the Second Case:

The case is a 15-year-old adolescent enrolled in the first year of secondary school after obtaining his middle school certificate. He lives in a family composed of both parents and three siblings (two sisters and one brother). The family’s economic situation appears to be satisfactory, as both parents have stable monthly incomes sufficient to cover the family’s needs and requirements.

The semi-structured clinical interview with the case proceeded under very good conditions. He was willing to talk and spoke spontaneously after the introductory question, which allowed us to proceed directly to the main interview guide questions. He answered all questions freely and naturally. When asked about his internet use, he confidently and immediately replied “of course,” stating that he had been using it for a long time—about 4 or 5 years. He reported using it between six to eight hours per day, sometimes more, though during the school period, this decreased to two or three hours. He said: “Six to eight hours, but during school, two to three hours... when we go out, I don’t use it, I leave it. During holidays, I stay up till morning, till sunrise.”

He uses the internet exclusively at home and never outside, mostly individually, although he sometimes uses it collectively: “I use it alone... but I play with my friends, not on the same computer, each one on his own.” The main sites he visits are YouTube and gaming sites, as he said: “YouTube, Facebook a little, and there’s a gaming site called Steam, especially EPIC Games.”

He stated that he prefers staying home with the internet rather than going out with friends: “I don’t go out much, I like staying home with my computer... even when my friends call me, I don’t feel like going out. Sometimes I don’t answer, they call, leave, and think I’m not home, especially when I’m alone.”

He believes that the internet has been beneficial and helpful in many aspects of his life, although it has slightly affected his academic performance and health. He said: “It benefited me a lot, I learned many things, especially about computers. For studies, I search on Google and YouTube and find everything. During COVID-19, before the automatic middle school graduation announcement, I was revising lessons online. In my personal life, I gained self-confidence seeing people perform confidently on stage before thousands. I became able to express myself too, especially in comments.”

Regarding negative effects, he admitted: “The harm shows in my studies; my results dropped, and my eyesight got a bit worse.” On how internet disconnection affects his mood, he elaborated: “Between 11 a.m. and evening, if there’s no internet, I feel something’s missing, I must find a solution.”

About the difference between his internet use before and after the COVID-19 crisis, he recounted: “Before COVID-19, I used to study; I woke up early, went to school, the time was scheduled from 8 to 5, I didn’t spend much time online, just watched new videos, then revised, had dinner, prayed, and slept. I also did swimming and sometimes played football with my friends.” After the crisis: “During COVID-19, I started connecting more, improving my gaming skills. I woke up around 12:30 or 1, stayed on the computer until 4 or 5, took a short break, then went back until 3 a.m., sometimes until morning. My mom, when she wakes up for dawn prayer, finds me still on the computer making noise. She talks calmly, tries to reason with me, and even made me a daily schedule to reduce my use, but I couldn’t stick to it.”

When asked about his view on excessive internet use, he said honestly: “It’s normal because my group—the gamers—usually spend six hours, it’s normal since one game can take 40 to 50 minutes.”

He admitted feeling guilty, knowing it’s harmful but unable to resist: “The internet makes me forget all my worries. No matter what happens, when I play a game, everything disappears. But when I see my family, especially my mom, upset, I feel I’m doing something wrong and justify it by saying my dream is to create something like Amazon, to sell computer stuff.”

4-2-3- Analysis of Interview Content with the Second Case:

The adolescent lives in a positive family atmosphere. He appears intelligent and quick-witted; his school results are fairly good, close to “good.” He tends toward isolation and prefers staying at home rather than going out or spending time with friends. His main hobby is online gaming, especially EPIC Games on Steam. It seems he imitated his older siblings in using the internet.

Family relations appear not severely affected by internet use: “Internet didn’t affect much... relations became a bit tense sometimes, they just tell me to reduce.” His preference for isolation—“I don’t go out, I like staying home with my computer”—is a symptom of internet addiction. His school performance and health slightly declined, and he experiences mood changes, especially anxiety in the morning (“I feel anxious at the beginning of the day, then live normally”). His attachment to the internet has become a high priority—“Anyone from Generation 99 can’t live without connection; everything’s digital now. Some even lose control when connection’s cut.”

The mother tries to help by reasoning with him: “Sometimes she talks calmly and advises me.” His excessive use increased during COVID-19 due to surplus free time: “Le vide (the emptiness) made me stay long on the internet.” The pandemic limited physical activities and social interactions, making the internet his only outlet. Although he sometimes uses it positively, he has become addicted. Emotionally, he feels guilt for his excessive use—contradicting his earlier statement that it’s “normal.” He also uses justification as a defense mechanism to relieve family tension.

4-2-4- Presentation of Internet Addiction Scale Results for the Second Case:

The Internet Addiction Test (Kimberly Young, INTERNET ADDICTION TEST) was conducted under good conditions. The participant was cooperative, intelligent, and provided explanations for each response. He scored **100**, which falls within the [80–100] range, indicating **excessive and problematic internet use** likely causing significant difficulties.

4-2-5- General Analysis of the Second Case:

Based on the interview and Internet Addiction Test, the case shows **excessive internet use**, particularly since the COVID-19 outbreak, which disrupted normal routines. The adolescent

experiences **emptiness** after losing structured school and sports activities— “I used to swim and play football with friends.” This void pushed him toward compulsive internet use to escape unmet needs and emotional conflicts.

Internet use heavily affected his **social life**—he prefers staying home rather than going out with friends: “I like staying home with my computer... even when my friends call, I don’t answer.” This isolation aligns with **Item 3** of the addiction scale (score: 6). Negative impacts include reduced concentration, slight academic decline, and eye strain—matching **Items 2, 6, and 8** (scores: 2, 3, and 3).

The mother, due to her job as a school principal and family responsibilities, cannot always supervise him. The father seems absent in the narrative. Her parenting alternates between firmness and leniency: “If she wakes at dawn, she finds me on the computer making noise... sometimes she talks calmly, advises me, tried making me a schedule but I couldn’t follow it.”

Internet use peaked during COVID-19 lockdown— “I improved my games, stayed from 12:30 to 4 or 5 a.m., sometimes until morning”—a sign of **compulsive behavior** (Item 13, score: 6). He also showed high irritation when the internet is cut or unpaid (**Items 14 and 20, score: 6 each**). Sleep was severely affected (Item 13, score: 6).

Thus, both the **interview** and **Young’s Internet Addiction Test** confirm addiction symptoms: neglect of school duties, insomnia, tension, restlessness during disconnection, anticipation for the next session, poor self-control, physical complaints (especially eye strain), and social withdrawal—all intensified by COVID-19 lockdown conditions.

5- Discussion of Results in Light of Study Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The level of internet addiction among adolescents during the COVID-19 crisis is high.

Hypothesis 2: The level of internet addiction among adolescents during the COVID-19 crisis varies according to parents’ educational level.

Results from both semi-structured interviews and Young’s Internet Addiction Test confirm **Hypothesis 1**: addiction levels were high among adolescents during COVID-19 lockdowns. The first case scored **108**, and the second case **100**, both within the excessive use range [80–100]. The most affected aspects were **compulsive behavior, family conflict, poor time management, and academic decline**.

These findings align with **Amina Saffa (2016)** in “*The Effects of Modern Technologies on Algerian Families – The Algerian Family as a Model*,” showing that internet’s psychological, social, ethical, and health effects on adolescents range from high to moderate, both positively and negatively. They also agree with **Greenfield (1998)**, who found that certain websites promote **loss of self-control** and **compulsive psychodynamic behavior**, fostering **alternative virtual relationships** that replace real-life interactions (Hammouda, 2015, p. 214).

During COVID-19 lockdowns, staying home became a protective necessity, and the **internet the only means of connection**. Adolescents—needing movement, socialization, and activity—spent excessive time online, leading to dependency. Hence, **Hypothesis 1 is confirmed**:

The level of internet addiction among adolescents during the COVID-19 crisis is high.

Regarding **Hypothesis 2**, results did **not confirm** a significant difference based on parents’ education.

In the first case, the mother was a homemaker with a medium educational level; high scores appeared on Items 5 and 14 (both 6), showing family complaints and irritability during interruptions. This supports **Ferraro G. (2003)** in “*Internet Addiction Disorder*,” which found youth more prone to addiction during COVID-19.

Despite the father’s higher education (a retired teacher), lenient understanding did not prevent excessive use. In the second case, both parents were educated, yet addiction remained high, possibly due to the mother’s work and limited supervision.

As **Amal Al-Zaydi (2014, p. 14)** explains, internet addiction often stems from **poor stress management, inadequate problem-solving skills, and failure to fill free time with diverse activities.**

Thus, **even with high parental education**, adolescent addiction remained elevated — **Hypothesis 2 is not supported.**

Conclusion

In today's digital era, internet use is unavoidable, yet overuse can lead to addiction. Overcoming it requires **life balance**—through sports, reading, socializing, and time management—rather than total abstinence.

This clinical study, using semi-structured interviews and **Young's Internet Addiction Test**, revealed that adolescent internet addiction **increased significantly during COVID-19 lockdowns**, and that **parental education level had no mitigating effect.**

Findings are limited to the studied cases but open the door for broader research.

Recommendations:

Raise awareness about responsible internet use through collective effort—by parents, educators, mental health professionals, and the media. Parental monitoring should focus on **time, duration, and content**. Relevant institutions should collaborate with families to develop easy communication programs addressing **the psychological and social effects of isolation, school closures, and reduced social contact** resulting from crises like COVID-19.

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