

The Analysis of the Causes and Intervention Strategies for Adolescent Internet Addiction

En Tang

School of Education and Sports, Yangtze University, Jingzhou, Hubei, 421000, China

Abstract: With the rapid development of Internet technology, adolescent internet addiction has become a global social issue. This paper aims to deeply analyze the causes of adolescents' obsession with the internet and explore effective intervention strategies. Through literature review, this study has collected a large amount of data to reveal the psychological, social, and environmental factors behind internet addiction. The study found that the main reasons for adolescent internet addiction include unmet psychological needs, the influence of family environment, the lack of school education, and the temptation of social culture. On this basis, this paper proposes a series of intervention measures, including strengthening mental health education, improving family communication, optimizing the school education model, and building a healthy online environment. Finally, this paper discusses the limitations of the study and makes suggestions for future research directions. This study not only provides a new perspective for understanding the phenomenon of adolescent internet addiction but also provides a theoretical basis and practical guidance for formulating relevant policies and practices.

Keywords: Adolescents; Internet Addiction; Etiology Analysis; Intervention Strategies.

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of the Internet has led to the widespread adoption of electronic products among adolescents, and the rate of Internet access among minors in China has also increased significantly. According to the "2021 National Research Report on the Internet Usage of Minors" released by the China Internet Information Center in 2022, by the end of 2021, the number of underage netizens in China had increased to 191 million, with a penetration rate of 96.8%, an increase of 1.9 percentage points from 2020. In the past six months, the Internet usage rate among minors has been as high as 99.9%, far exceeding the national average Internet penetration rate of 73%. [1] With the popularization of Internet use, the phenomenon of adolescent internet addiction has also shown a trend of becoming younger, posing a potential threat to the mental and physical health of adolescents. Internet addiction may lead to negative consequences such as adolescents being indifferent to family relationships, a decline in academic performance, and damage to interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the supervision and guidance of adolescents' Internet usage behavior, as well as the prevention and intervention of internet addiction, have become pressing social issues that need to be addressed.

2. Manifestations of Adolescent Internet Addiction

2.1. Strong Dependency on the Internet

Adolescents, in an environment lacking effective family supervision, lack of fun, and a lack of positive peer influence, often find it hard to resist the allure of the virtual online world. Faced with the emptiness and boredom of real life, they tend to pass the time by immersing themselves in the online world, gradually developing a dependency on the internet that can even surpass their needs for real life. Research indicates that the tendency towards boredom is one of the key factors in predicting adolescent internet addiction. Individuals with a high tendency for boredom are usually in a state of low

arousal, and they tend to seek out novel and exciting activities to elevate their psychological arousal levels. Adolescents with internet addiction often use their mobile phones to play games at school to kill time instead of studying, and this behavior becomes even more pronounced during the summer holidays. They keep their phones with them while eating, sleeping, and even using the bathroom, as if studying and going out are activities that will never happen to them. Sometimes they speak rudely to their grandparents who discipline them, and they turn a deaf ear to their parents' words.

2.2. Difficulty in Controlling Negative Emotions

Academic research has shown a significant correlation between internet addiction and mental health issues such as depression. Once individuals become excessively immersed in the online world, their cognitive logic and emotional stability may be affected, manifesting in emotional fluctuations such as excitement, irritability, or sadness. The fleeting sense of pleasure triggered by the online environment often dissipates rapidly once adolescents leave the virtual world, leading to anxiety, restlessness, low mood, and uncontrollable temper. These fluctuations in emotional states can significantly increase the risk of developing depression.

2.3. Resistance to Family Relationships

The internet constitutes a boundless virtual space that allows individuals to play a leading role and temporarily escape the pressures and constraints of real life. This isolation from reality provides some adolescents with internet addiction an "idealized refuge" for escaping reality. They tend to resist guidance and care in real life and express inner resistance and dissatisfaction through silence, rebellion, and other irrational behaviors. Such behavior may lead to indifference to family relationships and even develop into hostility towards family affection.

2.4. Impaired Physical Function

Individuals with internet addiction often exhibit a severe

imbalance in time management, with internet usage occupying a significant proportion of their daily time allocation, sometimes exceeding 80% of the average daily time. This excessive reliance on the internet, often accompanied by prolonged sitting or lying down, can negatively impact the physical health of adolescents. Adolescence is a critical stage of physical development, and prolonged screen exposure coupled with a lack of exercise can lead to delayed physical function development, poor lifestyle habits, decreased sleep quality, difficulty concentrating, and decreased appetite. Over time, this lifestyle may also cause nervous system disorders, leading to gradual physical decline and even increasing the risk of sudden death among adolescents.

3. Analysis of the Causes of Adolescent Internet Addiction

3.1. Individual Factors

3.1.1. Personality Traits of Adolescents

Empirical studies have revealed the correlation between personality traits and internet addiction. Neuroticism, psychoticism, and introversion personality traits are positively correlated with internet addiction. Individuals with these traits may experience greater emotional fluctuations, lower levels of socialization, and deficiencies in interpersonal relationships, making them more prone to becoming addicted to the internet. Conversely, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and low self-disclosure personality traits are negatively correlated with internet addiction, indicating that individuals with these traits have stronger self-control, a clear sense of responsibility, and thus a lower likelihood of internet addiction. [2]

3.1.2. The Need for Self-Actualization among Adolescents

The need for self-actualization among adolescents is one of the internal driving forces behind internet addiction behavior. The anonymity and virtuality of the online environment provide a platform for adolescents to meet their diverse psychological needs. Problems that are difficult to resolve in real life and psychological experiences that are hard to obtain can often be addressed and experienced through alternative means in the online world. Compared to real life, the online space is more conducive to individuals gaining a sense of satisfaction and achievement, including the fulfillment of curiosity, the realization of control desires, the achievement of self-accomplishment, and the experience of belonging. The satisfaction of these psychological needs may encourage adolescents to seek the realization of self-worth in the online environment.

3.2. School Factors

3.2.1. Excessive Academic Pressure

Against the backdrop of increasingly fierce social competition, the academic pressure on adolescents has significantly increased, especially in key competitive education stages such as middle school and college entrance examinations, where grades are given extremely high value. Research has pointed out that stressful life events are a risk factor for adolescent internet addiction, and internet addiction behavior itself can be seen as a behavioral response of adolescents to stress. This coping mechanism may stem from the online environment's ability to provide immediate escape and psychological comfort, making adolescents inclined to seek temporary relief by indulging in the internet when facing

academic pressures in real life.[3]Stressful life events in adolescents positively predict internet addiction, meaning the more stressful life events adolescents experience, the more symptoms of internet addiction they have, and the more likely they are to develop internet addiction.[4]

3.2.2. Teachers' Evaluation of Students is Singular

In the current education system, exam results remain the main standard for measuring student performance. For students with poor academic performance, they often find it difficult to gain teacher attention, thus feeling a strong sense of frustration. Lacking recognition in the real world, these students may turn to the internet to seek confidence and ways to relieve stress. Over time, this behavioral pattern may lead to excessive dependence on the internet, leading to internet addiction. Research has shown that the degree of student connection to school, that is, the care and sense of belonging students feel at school, is inversely proportional to the risk of internet addiction. When students have a low degree of school connection, they are more likely to compensate for the deficiencies and dissatisfaction in real life through internet addiction. This lack of connection may exacerbate students' dependence on the internet, increasing the risk of internet addiction.[5]In addition, the deterioration of the teacher-student relationship is also an important factor in triggering adolescent internet addiction. A good teacher-student relationship can stimulate students' motivation to learn, while a rigid teacher-student relationship may also lead to an increase in students' aversion to learning.

3.3. Social Factors

3.3.1. Lack of Internet Regulation

Although the Chinese government has repeatedly emphasized the need to strengthen the management of internet cafes and the healthy supervision of online information resources, challenges still exist in the actual implementation process. There are loopholes in the supervision of internet cafes, and many cafes lack legal documents or incomplete licenses. In addition, the supervision of the sources of online information resources is not strict, leading to a proliferation of various types of information on the internet. Some internet cafe owners, in order to make a profit, even provide links to domestic and foreign games and unhealthy online content, allowing adolescents to access the internet without restrictions. This environment provides adolescents with an excessively free online space, increasing their risk of becoming addicted to the internet.

3.3.2. The Internet Environment's Attraction to Adolescents

The online environment is filled with a large amount of complex and unfiltered information, including obscene, pornographic, violent, and negative content. Since adolescents have not yet fully formed a stable worldview, outlook on life, and values, they are susceptible to the influence of these types of information, leading to blurred concepts of right and wrong, confused thinking, and potentially weakening their sense of social responsibility. This information environment poses potential risks to the mental health and behavioral development of adolescents.

3.4. Family Factors

3.4.1. Improper Parenting Styles

The family environment has a decisive impact on the healthy growth of adolescents and plays a key role in the issue

of adolescent internet addiction. Improper parenting styles are considered an important factor in inducing adolescent internet addiction. According to self-determination theory, parental behaviors, especially psychological control, may lead to conflict if they do not match the child's psychological needs. Parents with a high tendency for psychological control may excessively interfere in their children's lives, imposing their own expectations and requirements on their children, which contradicts adolescents' needs for autonomy and independence. This parenting style may suppress adolescents' ability to express personal thoughts, increase their sense of helplessness and learned helplessness, and thus trigger negative emotions. Adolescents growing up in this environment are more likely to develop internet addiction behaviors compared to their peers.

3.4.2. Lack of Parental Care for Children

Previous research has found that family risk factors have a significant adverse impact on adolescent internet addiction. Adolescents are in a rebellious period, and their minds are not yet mature. At this time, if they lack necessary parental supervision and sufficient warm support, they may exhibit excessive internet use.[6] The family is an important environment affecting the psychological development of adolescents, and its basic function is to provide environmental conditions on the physiological, psychological, and social levels to promote the healthy development of family members.[7]

4. Intervention Measures for Adolescent Internet Addiction

4.1. Strengthening Mental Health Education for Adolescents

The mental health of adolescents is crucial and should be emphasized by both families and schools. Adolescents need to learn how to self-regulate their psychological state, develop self-guidance abilities, and correctly understand the importance of mental health education. At the same time, they should recognize the negative impacts of internet addiction, clarify the difference between real life and the virtual online world, and adjust their attitude towards the internet. Schools should not only focus on enrollment rates but also offer mental health courses or integrate mental health education into other courses, establish psychological counseling rooms, and hire professional psychology teachers to provide psychological support for students. For students who are already addicted to the internet, schools should continue to provide psychological counseling and regularly conduct psychological interventions to help them overcome internet addiction and rebuild confidence in learning and life.

4.2. Creating a Relaxed Learning Environment

As the core place for adolescent education and activities, schools should take comprehensive measures to prevent adolescent internet addiction. Firstly, schools need to strengthen internet education, guide adolescents to use the internet safely and reasonably, let students recognize the pros and cons of the internet, and achieve prevention is better than cure. Secondly, schools should organize a variety of campus cultural and social practice activities to enrich students' after-school life and cultivate their diverse interests and skills. Finally, schools should update educational concepts, pay attention to the cultivation of students' comprehensive

abilities, and use multiple evaluation systems to go beyond a single score evaluation, to positively view students' growth and development. Through these measures, schools can help adolescents establish healthy internet usage habits while promoting their comprehensive development.

4.3. Strengthening the Construction and Supervision of Internet Civilization

Firstly, it is necessary to improve relevant laws and regulations, strengthen the supervision of public places for adolescents, and especially impose strict penalties on illegal internet cafes. Secondly, the supervision of internet content should be enhanced to severely crack down on websites containing illegal content such as pornography and violence, in order to purify the online environment and make it a platform for disseminating positive social information and providing educational entertainment. Lastly, according to the physical and mental development characteristics of adolescents, actively guide enterprises to develop websites suitable for adolescents, and encourage adolescents to explore and innovate healthily, to achieve personal value. Through these measures, a positive and healthy online growth environment can be created for adolescents.

4.4. Creating a Caring Family Atmosphere

Mental health is closely linked to social support, and the family, as a key social support system for adolescents, parents should maintain positive interpersonal interactions, create a harmonious and warm family environment, let children feel the warmth of the family, and reduce their need to turn to the internet for comfort. Parents should maintain a positive attitude towards the internet, guide reasonably instead of simply prohibiting, encourage moderate use of the internet, and help adolescents develop healthy internet habits to prevent internet addiction. Internet addiction, as an emerging psychological disorder, has emerged with technological progress and social change, and many scholars are continuously researching its prevention strategies. Overall, as long as society fully recognizes the importance of preventing adolescent internet addiction, regards it as an interdisciplinary systematic project, and gathers the strength of fields such as psychology and medicine, an effective prevention system can be constructed.

5. Summary

The factors affecting adolescent internet addiction cover multiple aspects including personal traits, family environment, social influence, and school education. Therefore, the following strategies are recommended: first, strengthen mental health education for adolescents to improve their self-regulation abilities; second, create a relaxed learning atmosphere to reduce academic pressure; third, strengthen the construction and supervision of internet civilization to purify the online environment; fourth, create a caring family atmosphere and provide positive family support. Since the causes of internet addiction are complex, a comprehensive consideration of various factors is needed, and a diversified approach should be taken to help adolescents overcome this predicament.

References

- [1] China Internet Information Center, (2022). Research Report on the Internet Usage of Minors in China 2021. December 1, 2022.

- [2] Hou Juan, Fan Ning, Qin Huan, et al. The Impact of Adolescents' Big Five Personality Traits on Internet Addiction: The Mediating Role of Family Function [J]. *Exploration of Psychology*, 2018, 38(3): 279-288.
- [3] Zhu Yunjiao, Sun Yehua, Hao Jia Hu, et al. The Relationship between Negative Life Events, Depression, and Internet Addiction among Freshmen in Vocational Colleges in Anhui Province [J]. *Chinese Journal of School Health*, 2019, 40(10): 1499-1502.
- [4] Li Bonan, Xiong Ruoyu, Peng Peng, Jia Liping, Lu Guohua. The Impact of Adolescents' Stressful Life Events on Internet Addiction: A Moderated Mediation Model [J]. *Chinese Journal of Health Psychology*, 2022, 30(07): 1087-1092.
- [5] Jin Cancan, Zou Hong, Li Xiaowei. Adolescents' Social Adaptation: Protective and Risk Factors and Their Cumulative Effects [J]. *Journal of Beijing Normal University (Social Sciences Edition)*, 2011(01): 12-20.
- [6] Ko Chih-Hung, Wang Peng-Wei, Liu Tai-Ling, Yen Cheng-Fang, Chen Cheng-Sheng, Yen Ju-Yu. Bidirectional associations between family factors and Internet addiction among adolescents in a prospective investigation. [J]. *Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, 2015, 69(4).
- [7] Epstein NB, Baldwin LM, Bishop DS. The McMaster Family Assessment Device [J]. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 1983, 9(2): 171-180.