



## INTERNET ADDICTION AND ANXIETY AMONG STUDENTS OF UNIVERSITY OF TIRANA

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### **Abstract:**

There is no question that 21st-century youth has become far more dependent upon connectivity for studying, playing, communicating, and socializing (Wallace, 2014). Scientific studies have found that excessive use of internet is related to a variety of negative psychosocial consequences. Internet addiction is a kind of consumer behavior that has attracted the attention of many studies.

This study was conducted to see not only the prevalence of Internet addiction in male and female students, but also to see the relationship between internet addiction and level of anxiety.

The study sample consists of 256 subjects of Faculty of Social Sciences, in University of Tirana, Albania, where 142 subjects are female and 114 others are male. Internet Addiction Test (IAT) and Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) were used as instruments for data collection. From the data analysis results to have not a significant relationship between the level of Internet addiction and the level of anxiety in university students, but we can see gender differences with regard to this aspect.

**Keywords:** internet addiction, anxiety, students, quantitative research, University of Tirana

### **Introduction**

The Internet is a widely recognized channel for information exchange, academic research, entertainment, communication and commerce (Widyanto, Griffiths &

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Brunsdon 2011). This technology is changing the way people are socializing, studying, working, shopping, searching for jobs and spending their leisure time (DiNicola, 2004). The internet has become an integral part of our society. About 40% of the world population today is regular internet users. Statistical data from 2013, shows that about 62.7% of Albania's population are Internet users, 35.4% are users of Facebook and 75.8% discharge of various internet programs (Europe Internet Stats, 2013)<sup>1</sup>. Today, these figures should certainly be much higher.

Although the positive aspects of the Internet have been readily praised, there is a growing amount of literature on the negative side of its excessive and pathological use (Beard, 2005; Frangos & Frangos, 2009).

The new generation is among the first groups to use the Internet with a high degree of danger to the different psychosocial problems (DiNicola, 2004). Today, worldwide, more than 80% of young people have access to the Internet and spend a great deal of time in online activities.

Because of access added and increase the number of users, researchers have concluded that the use of internet can bring negative consequences on the psychological welfare of users (Vallerand et al, 2003). Griffiths (2000) argued that the use of social networks could lead to a new form of addiction.

Excessive use of the Internet is known nowadays as a new syndrome observed even among the psychological researches, giving them a new spirit (Yellowlees & Marks, 2007). The authors point out that excessive use of the internet and pathological results in the individual isolation from friends and family can lead to behavioral or personal disorders.

One of the worst effects of internet addiction is anxiety, stress and depression. Increase in using internet makes some problems that one of them is internet anxiety (Nima & Nazarin, 2012). There exists a positive and significant correlation between the level of anxiety and internet addiction (Nima & Nazarin, 2012).

The present research is also aimed at investigation of relationship between internet addiction and anxiety level among students and the gender based differences of internet addiction in university students of Tirana.

## **Literature Review**

In the scientific literature, are proposed several terms to describe the pathological use of the internet: *internet use disorder*, *Internet addiction*, *problematic internet use*, *pathologic internet use*, *cyber dependence*, online addiction and other (Widyanto and McMurrin, 2004; Byun et al, 2009).

Problematic Internet use (PIU), or Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD), are the two most commonly used terminologies and are characterized by a lack of control over the concern, encouragement, or problems related to anxiety as a result of its use. Because of the increased level of Internet use during the last 15 years, IAD has attracted the attention of researchers and clinicians in the field. Young (1999) and Griffiths (2000) were the first who defined the concept of IAD and realized further research about the problematic use of internet.

Internet addiction disorder (IAD) was originally proposed in 2013, for inclusion in DSM-5 (Block, 2008) but it is not recognized yet as a disorder by itself, since Block observed that diagnosis was complicated, because 86% of study subjects showing symptoms of Internet addiction, also exhibited other diagnosable mental health disorders. Internet gaming addiction is the only behavioral addiction (non-substance related) involved in DSM-5. Internet Gaming Disorder is identified in Section III as a condition warranting more clinical research and experience before it might be considered for inclusion in the main book as a formal disorder.

Addictive internet use is defined as “an impulse control disorder that does not involve an intoxicant” and is akin to pathological gambling (Young, 1998). Young further categorized five specific types of internet addiction: (1) cyber sexual addiction to adult chat rooms or cyber porn; (2) cyber relationship addiction to online friendships or affairs that replace real-life situations; (3) net compulsions to online gambling, auctions, or obsessive trading; (4) information overload to compulsive web surfing or databases searches; and (5) computer addiction to game playing or programming (Young, 1998). Like other addictions, furthermore, internet addiction has been linked to a variety of problems. Besides little sleep, failure to eat for long periods and limited physical activity, it also disrupts the studies and other aspects of the daily life of an individual (Cao & Su & Gao, 2006).

Different researches (Yellowlees and Marks, 2007; Kim et al, 2006; Amiel & Sargent, 2004; Nie & Erbring, 2008) have indicated that some of the addiction symptoms of internet include excessive connection to the Internet; involuntary and fastidious use of the internet; difficulty in time management using the internet; and feeling of a dreary world outside the internet. All of which result in a reduction in social communications and an increase in loneliness and depression. Ko et al (2008) stated that Internet addiction relates to psychological variables such as shyness, loneliness, anxiety, depression, and interpersonal relations. Increase in the use internet makes some problems and one of them is internet anxiety.

Research from Bari and Edelman in a sample of 169 college students has shown that people who suffer from social anxiety, it is easier to communicate through the Internet rather than in direct interaction and according to them one of the reasons is the

possibility of maintaining anonymity. Results of this study also showed that social anxiety, lack of confidence in itself and depression may be related to the amount of internet usage (Shepherd & Edelmann, 2005). A study by Rice and Markey in a sample of 80 female subjects with an average age of 18.8 years showed that some people feel less anxious and communicate through the Internet instead of direct communication; this due to personality traits such as Introversion and neuropsychotic factors (Rice & Markey, 2008).

Anxiety disorder was found in several studies of adult problematic Internet users. In a study done on 332 students at schools in California regarding the relationship between impulsiveness, personality traits and addiction by Merkerk, Ajenden and Franken (2010) showed that internet addiction can be one of the predictors of impulsivity and anxiety. The results of the study have showed that there is a significant relationship between the internet addiction and mental health.

There exists a positive and significant correlation between the level of anxiety and internet addiction (Nima, 2012). Problematic internet usage may lead to avoidance to face the social interactions and worsen social fears (Lee & Stapinski, 2012). There is also found a significant relationship between anxiety and depression in childhood with internet addiction in adolescent. Clinicians should consider anxiety during childhood to prevent internet addiction (Cho & Shin, 2013). Thus, the study shows that anxiety significantly predicts internet addiction.

Another factor is that of gender difference. The preponderance of internet addiction in male students is more than female students (Jalalinejad, 2012).

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To determine the relationship between Internet addiction and anxiety level in university students of Social Sciences Faculty of Tirana.
2. To determine the prevalence of Internet addiction in university students of Social Sciences Faculty of Tirana.
3. To see the gender difference in the level of internet addiction among university students.

### **Research Questions:**

1. *How far students are addicted to internet?*
2. *Is the rate of Internet addiction different for male and female students?*
3. *What is the relationship between internet addiction and anxiety level among students?*

## **Methodology**

### **Design**

This study used a cross-sectional design, as the main tool of quantitative methodology, where data are collected on the whole study population at a single point in time. That relies heavily on statistical techniques and mathematical numerical data, in order to answer the questions about various social problems.

### **The Sample**

The population of this study includes students from Faculty of Social Sciences in Tirana. It was created a probabilistic sample of 256 subjects (where 142 are women and 114 men). The representation of the population object of the study was conducted through random selection.

### **Assessment Tools**

#### *Internet Addiction Test (IAT)*

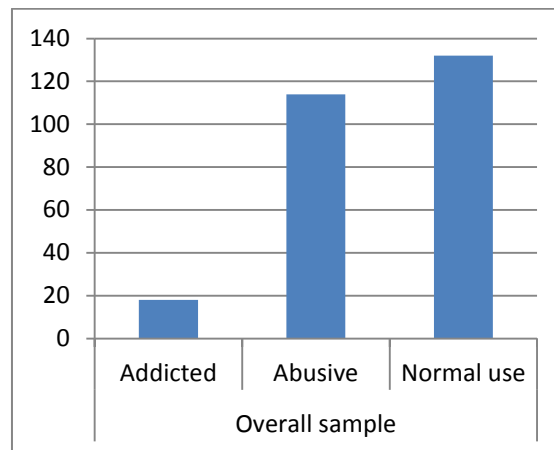
IAT is created by Dr. Kimberly Young. This questionnaire consists of 20 questions, which measure the low, moderate or higher level of dependence on the Internet. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient is 0.90. This questionnaire is scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 to 5. The marking for this questionnaire ranges from 20-100, the higher the marks are the greater dependence on the Internet is.

#### *Beck Anxiety Inventory*

The Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) is a questionnaire of twenty-one items implied to measure anxiety among participants. Each question has a set of four possible answers. These are; not at all (0), mildly (1), moderately (2), severely (3). The BAI has a maximum score of 63, from low to high anxiety. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient is 0.87. Data was analyzed through Microsoft Excel program.

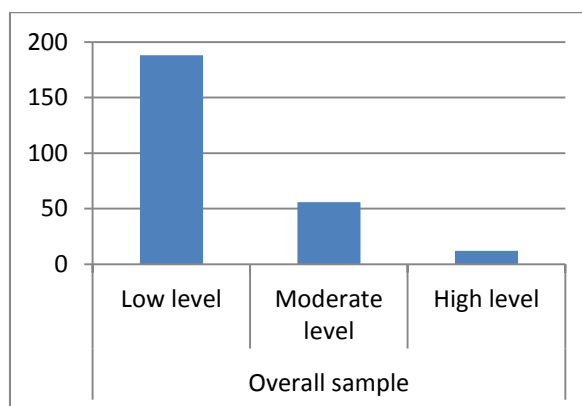
## **Research Findings**

### **a) Interpretation of the data concerning the use of the Internet for the whole sample**



**Figure 1:** Level of internet use for the whole sample

In a total sample of 256 subjects (142 females and 114 males), we can see that 128 subjects display normal Internet use, 114 subjects are internet abusers and 14 others are internet addicted.

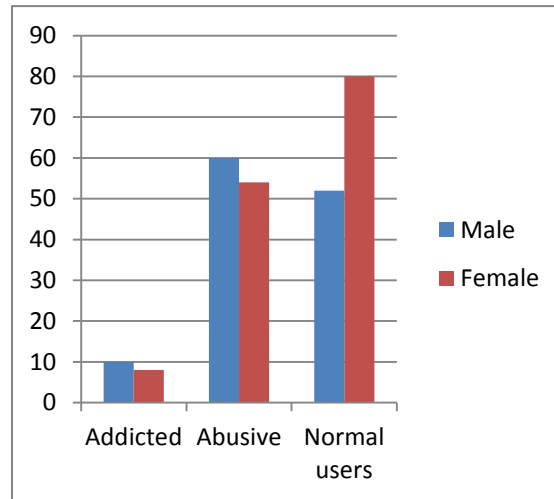


**Figure 2:** Level of addiction for the whole sample

Most of the subjects (48%) appear to be normal Internet users. This is followed by a high percentage and not a very big difference in the first (43%) who are abusive to the Internet and a small percentage (9%) that display Internet addiction.

### **b) The comparison of Internet use for both genders**

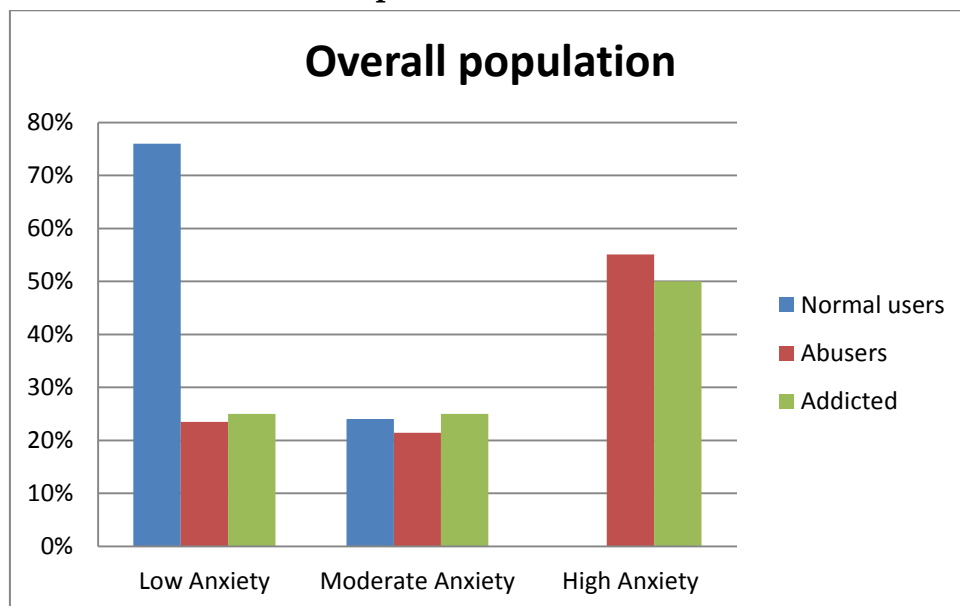
The following graph translates these numbers into percentages.



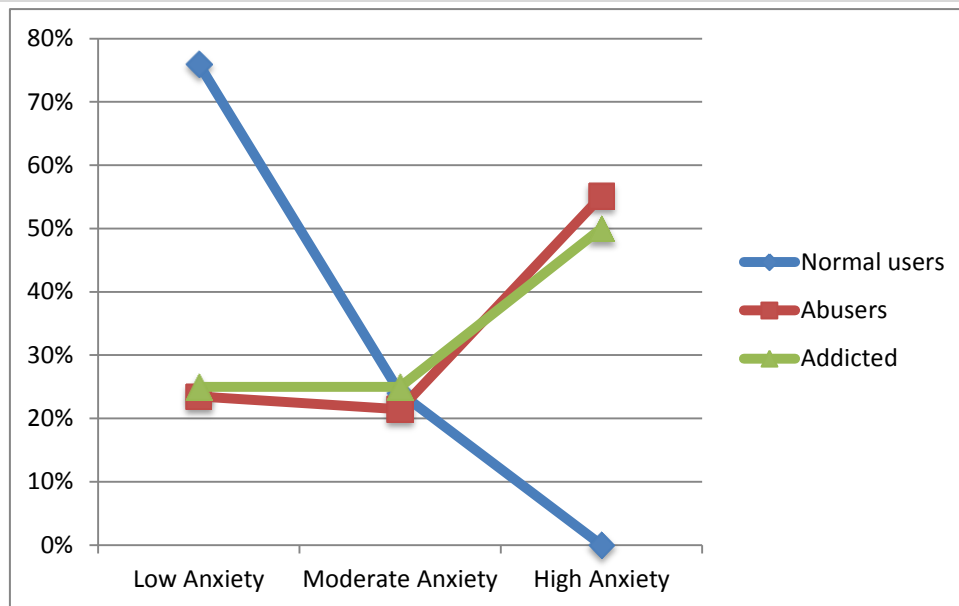
**Figure 3:** The comparison of Internet use for both genders

Differences between women and men are visible. Women have a much higher percentage as normal Internet users, than men. Internet abusers results 49% male and 38% female. 8% of men and 6% of women are addicted to the internet.

**c) Interpretation for the whole sample**



**Figure 4:** The presentation in percentage of Internet connection between addiction and level of anxiety



**Figure 5:** The percentage of connection between Internet addiction and level of anxiety

To this last graph, we can clearly see if there is a relationship between Internet addiction and level of anxiety. To answer the question whether or not a relationship, it is seen for all sample rates.

76% of subjects who are normal Internet users, resulting in low levels of anxiety and 24% of them exhibit a moderate level of anxiety. There are no normal Internet users with a high level of anxiety. Here it can be assumed for a positive relationship because it turns out that normal users have a low level of anxiety.

23% of subjects who are abusers to the Internet, resulting in low levels of anxiety, 21% of them exhibit a moderate level of anxiety and 55% a higher level of anxiety. From these percentages, it can be understood that there is a relationship between high levels of anxiety and abusive internet use.

25% of internet addicted exhibit a lower level of anxiety, 25% of them still show a moderate level of anxiety and 50% of them a high level of anxiety. Here clearly can be seen and can be understood if these two variables have a positive relationship or not. Although these subjects who report height level of addiction, show no difference in figures between low and moderate levels of anxiety.

## Discussion

A study conducted among university level students by Waseem et al 2014 showed 30% of students are internet addicts which is considerably higher result then what we got in study averaging of only about 9%.



The findings of this study showed that the rate of severe addiction is greater in female students than in male students. These results are in the same line with Ali et al 2012 and Zeynep et al 2012, who showed that females more than males had signs of internet addiction, but it may be due to higher no of man participating in the study.

These findings are inconsistent with those of Hill and Argyle, and Yang and Tung soft swimming with that of Hamburger and Artzi or Davoodabadi (Hills & Argyle, 2003; Yang & Tung, 2004; Hamburger & Artzi, 2000; Davoodabadi, 2006), which show that males are considerably more prone to internet addiction.

In reply to the third question, it can be said that anxiety doesn't play a significant role in the affliction with internet addiction. The findings of the present study are contradictory with the previous researches (Shepherd & Edelman, 2005, Rice & Markey, 2008). In determining the relationship between anxiety with Internet addiction, they stated that the high anxiety may have existed before the Internet use, that is, the anxious individuals may use Internet as an escaping way. Similarly, anxiety may occur due to addiction to the Internet, that is, when the individual becomes addicted to the Internet, s/he becomes restless, worried and anxious, and uses Internet to reduce her/his anxiety and stress (Mirzaeian et al, 2011). In this regard, Nastizaei (2010) writes: the users addicted to the Internet have considerable anxiety and apprehension. These individuals may therefore use the Internet as an escaping way, that is, when a person does not have access to the Internet, s/he becomes anxious and to reduce his/her anxiety, s/he precedes Internet.

However, several limitations of the study should be noted, to provide direction for future research. First, the sample of the study consisted of university students and may not be representative of the general adult population in terms of the frequency of internet addiction or the prevalence of anxiety, because generalization of the results is somewhat limited. Second, no definitive statements can be made about causality. Third, although there is growing recognition of internet addiction among clinicians, it is still unrecognized as a psychiatric disorder and there are controversial issues concerning assessment and diagnosis.

## **Conclusion**

If we make a comparison between the two genders, we can see that men exhibit a greater tendency to be abusive than women, but women have resulted in a higher tendency to be addicted to the Internet, although this on a small margin (1%). Overall, it can be said that male subjects tend to be problematic internet users more than female subjects.

Nearly half of the whole sample results as normal users, but there is no very large margin (5%) of the subjects that results abusive. This means that entities generally have a considerable tendency to be abusive of the Internet. However, the level of internet addiction in general results lower (9%).

Despite that, one cannot speak of a positive relationship between addiction and anxiety to entities of the genre, because proportion to the low level of anxiety is 50%. Most of the subjects that are normal internet users (85%) report low levels of anxiety and only a small fraction of them exhibit a moderate level of anxiety. There is no normal internet user with a high level of anxiety.

Also, most of the subjects that are abusers to the Internet, resulting in low levels of anxiety, but also a large part of them reports moderate level of anxiety. A very small fraction of the sample displays a high level of anxiety.

Subjects addicted to the internet show no difference between the low and moderate level of anxiety. Also, only a small percentage compared to the first two, reports high level of anxiety.

- There is no significant relationship between the level of internet addiction and the level of anxiety.
- Female students are suffering from internet addiction more than male students, but male show higher level of abusive internet use.
- In the whole sample most of the subjects appear to be normal Internet users. A small percentage of the sample display Internet addiction.

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