

Psychosocial Repercussions of Problematic Smartphone Use among Youth

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Mental health is an important area of interest all over the world. It has been demonstrated that on average, people who have mental health disorders live 20 years less than those who are mentally healthy.¹ One of the most common issues which have gained worldwide popularity in affecting mental health is problematic smartphone use (PSU).² The excessive use of smartphones is considered problematic as it affects the mental and physical health.³ Smartphone misuse have a significant role in worsening the wellbeing and producing psychological complications and physical health issues among adolescents and youth. According to the World Health Organization, almost 20% of the world's youth have mental health issues and about half of them may develop disorders or are at risk of having psychological illness at early adolescent age. Enormous literature has also shown that people engaged in surfing various apps on social media are likely to have psychological problems as compared to those who are using less. Pakistani youth is equally at risk for the development of mental health issues due to the fast-growing use of smartphones. One of the reasons for the problematic use of smartphones is lack of awareness and education, boredom, poor coping skills, and lack of goal, direction and orientation. Moreover, once a person indulges in this addictive behavior then coming out of it is very difficult, as there is a lack of facilities where such youth can get counseling and some interventions.

Another reason why people continuously engage in using smartphones is having a fear of missing something important.⁴ This fear makes them continuously browse social media apps like

Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc which in turn are affecting the daily lives of users. PSU is considered to be associated with anxiety, substance abuse, PTSD, poor academic performance, poor mental health, thoughts of committing suicide and actual suicidal attempts.^{5,6} Besides, symptoms of depression and mood disturbance were also observed in the students with high PSU as compared to those who don't show problematic smartphone use. The online educational activities due to the COVID pandemic have further increased the scope of the problem. However, in comparison to the west, the empirical literature is scarce and no intervention has been developed and tested to counter the SMU and its consequences on mental health. Moreover, level of physical activity, mood, and problematic smartphone use has shown that the adolescent students who are more physically inactive are more likely to show problematic smartphone use. In general, problematic smartphone use and physical inactivity can certainly reduce the stamina of adolescents and make them more prone to depression and sexual problems.^{7,8} In a study with university students, findings showed that almost 20.1% of the sample has revealed problematic smartphone use with lower grades in academics and alcohol use disorders.

While seeing the gender differences on the PSU, female adolescents were more affected by the problematic use of the smartphone. Moreover, dependency on the smartphone has decreased the energy and damaged the mental health of males.⁹ A recent study conducted in Israel has shown that people engaged in surfing various apps on social media are likely to have poor sleep, teeth grinding, and may suffer from severe jaw pain. People who use kosher phones (phones which do not have inbuilt social media apps) are less engaged in teeth grinding and lesser sleep-related problems.¹⁰ Problematic use of the smartphone has gained public health importance because of its association with many mental health issues and poor academic performance. Findings of previous researches have suggested that the high addiction level of

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smartphone users can be effectively reduced by engaging them in exercise and other physical activities. Games and exercise play a vital role in reducing the effects of PSU. For instance, in a study conducted on college students has shown that group-based basketball has significantly decreased the PSU and lowered their loneliness, feeling of anxiety, inadequacy, and perceived stress. Studies are needed to be conducted at a mass level to assess the PSU and its mental health consequences among Pakistani youth. Moreover, there is a need to identify the psychosocial correlates of addictive smartphone use followed by educational programs to address the problematic smartphone use.

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