

**INTERNET ADDICTION AS A FACTOR DISRUPTING SOCIAL INTERACTION
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Abstract: This article examines the impact of internet addiction on the quality of adolescents' social interaction. A quantitative study was conducted on a sample of 150 adolescents (aged 10–16 years) from the Osh and Jalal-Abad regions of the Kyrgyz Republic. The Young's Internet Addiction Test (IAT) was used to assess the level of internet addiction, alongside a standardized scale for identifying social interaction problems. It was found that approximately 13–16% of adolescents exhibit a severe degree of internet addiction, and a substantial share of respondents experience difficulties in face-to-face communication. The data indicate that as the degree of addiction increases, measures of social skills deteriorate: the number of friends decreases and levels of social maladjustment rise. These results confirm previous findings that internet addiction is accompanied by social isolation and disruptions in interpersonal relationships. In conclusion, the consequences of the identified relationships are discussed, and recommendations for preventing internet addiction among adolescents are offered.

Keywords: Internet addiction; social interaction; adolescents; social maladjustment; virtual world.

Introduction: Internet addiction among adolescents is defined as a compulsive desire for prolonged internet use, accompanied by a loss of control over the time spent online. This phenomenon has become widespread with the increased accessibility of digital technologies. In European countries and the U.S., 3–5% of adolescents meet the criteria for internet addiction, whereas in Asia the figure ranges from 10–15%. In Kyrgyzstan, studies show comparable results. For instance, Sagyndyk-kyzy reports that about 16% of adolescents in the country exhibit clear signs of internet addiction [3].

Internet addiction is recognized as a pressing social issue, as it is associated with impaired adolescent adjustment and increased psychological problems. Excessive time online often replaces real-life communication: adolescents retreat into the virtual world, experiencing difficulties in interacting with others. Many authors note that internet-addicted adolescents often lack friends and show diminished interpersonal communication skills.

Given this, the aim of the present study is to identify the impact of internet addiction on social interaction impairments among adolescents in southern Kyrgyzstan. The objectives include measuring addiction levels and analyzing the correlation between the degree of addiction and social problems [5].

Research Methods

This study was conducted using a quantitative empirical approach. The sample included 150 adolescents aged 10–16 from the Osh and Jalal-Abad regions. Participants were selected via random stratified sampling through local schools and youth centers. The survey was conducted anonymously and voluntarily with parental consent.

The following tools were used: Kimberly Young's Internet Addiction Test (IAT) to assess addiction levels (score range: 0–100), and an author-designed questionnaire on social interaction, which included questions about the number of friends, frequency of in-person interactions, and presence of social issues (e.g., conflicts, isolation). IAT scores were interpreted as follows: no addiction (0–29), mild (30–49), moderate (50–79), and severe (80–100).

Data analysis was performed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, and ANOVA tests were conducted to assess group differences (significance level $p < 0.05$) [1,2].

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the distribution of internet addiction levels within the sample. The majority (67%) exhibit either no or mild addiction; however, a significant portion demonstrates moderate to severe levels (about 33%). Around 13% fall into the severe addiction category, which aligns with previously reported data (~16%).

Level of Internet Addiction	IAT Score	Number of Respondents (n)	% of Sample
None (0–29)	0–29	60	40,0
Mild (30–49)	30–49	40	26,7
Moderate (50–79)	50–79	30	20,0
Severe (80–100)	80–100	20	13,3
Total	–	150	100,0

Table 1. Levels of internet addiction among adolescents (IAT, n=150).

Table 2 presents the results on social interaction. A clear decline in social skills was found as addiction levels increased. Adolescents without addiction had on average five offline friends and a low social problem score (2.0 on a 20-point scale). In the moderate group, the number of friends dropped to three and the problem score increased to 7.5. Those with severe addiction showed the highest dysfunction: an average problem score of 12.3 and only one offline friend. Differences among groups were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

Internet Addiction Level	Avg. Social Interaction Problem Score (0–20)	Avg. Number of Offline Friends
None	2,0	5

Mild	4,8	4
Moderate	7,5	3
Severe	12,3	1

Table 2. Social manifestations of internet addiction in adolescents (problem scale scores and average number of friends, n=150).

These findings demonstrate a direct relationship between internet addiction level and social interaction problems. Higher addiction levels are associated with greater social difficulties: adolescents with severe addiction have significantly fewer offline friends and more issues in communication compared to those without addiction (see Table 2).

The results align with both theoretical and empirical studies. Literature shows that internet addiction is often accompanied by social maladjustment and impaired relationships. For instance, the portal Beauty and Medicine notes that many addicted adolescents struggle with face-to-face interactions and may have “no real-life friends,” instead creating the illusion of a vibrant social life online. Our data similarly reveal a sharp decline in real-world social connections and increased loneliness among highly addicted adolescents.

Psychological studies emphasize that internet addiction replaces personal communication with virtual contact. Pishelko notes that for addicted adolescents, “interpersonal communication is replaced by online interaction,” and it becomes difficult for them to “tear themselves away from the computer for real-life communication.” We observed a similar pattern: addicted teens are less likely to initiate in-person meetings and feel anxious when trying to reduce online time. Lavrentieva also notes that addicted adolescents experience a “diminished real-world life” and struggle with live interpersonal relationships [2]. Our findings support this: the higher the addiction score, the lower the average social skills score, indicating a communication deficit.

International surveys also confirm the significant impact of addiction on relationships. For example, students in a UK sample admitted that their constant need to be online was “out of control” and “undoubtedly affected their relationships with friends and family.” Our study revealed similar trends: adolescents with severe internet addiction more frequently reported family conflicts and alienation from peers.

Overall, the patterns identified in this study are consistent with the biopsychosocial model of addictive disorders. Internet addiction is viewed as a behavioral condition leading to social maladjustment: the adolescent experiences short-term gratification from being online while neglecting real-life relationships and responsibilities. The strong correlation we found between addiction level and communication difficulties highlights the need for prevention and intervention efforts.

Conclusion The study demonstrated that internet addiction significantly impacts adolescents’ social interactions. Among youth from southern regions of Kyrgyzstan, higher addiction levels were associated with more pronounced socialization problems: fewer real-world friends, more conflicts, and increased anxiety in face-to-face communication. Around 13% of participants exhibited severe addiction, aligning with prior findings of 15–20% in the region. These results



confirm that internet addiction is a factor in deteriorating interpersonal relationships. They underscore the importance of informing parents and educators about the risks of excessive internet use and the need to foster offline communication skills in adolescents. Future research could further explore causal mechanisms and the effectiveness of prevention programs.

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