



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Mobile Phone Addiction And Children's Mental Wellbeing: A Narrative Review

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Abstract

The widespread use of mobile phones among children has sparked growing concerns over their impact on mental wellbeing. While mobile technology offers educational and social benefits, excessive and uncontrolled use may lead to adverse psychological outcomes. This narrative review explores the association between mobile phone addiction and mental health issues in children, including anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, and behavioral problems. Through an analysis of recent literature, the paper highlights patterns, contributing factors, and implications for intervention. The review emphasizes the need for parental guidance, digital literacy, and mental health strategies to mitigate risks and promote balanced phone use.

Keywords: Mobile phone addiction, children, mental wellbeing, screen time, digital health, behavioral issues

Introduction

The proliferation of mobile technology has transformed the way children learn, socialize, and entertain themselves. Mobile phones offer accessibility to information and tools that can enhance learning and communication. However, the boundary between beneficial use and addiction is increasingly blurred. Mobile phone addiction, characterized by compulsive usage, withdrawal symptoms, and functional impairment, has emerged as a public health concern among children and adolescents. The rise in mobile device dependency coincides with an increase in mental health challenges in younger populations, necessitating critical examination of this relationship.

Understanding Mobile Phone Addiction

Mobile phone addiction is a form of behavioral addiction that shares similarities with substance use disorders, including tolerance, craving, and withdrawal. It often leads to neglect of responsibilities, academic decline, and social isolation. Children may be particularly vulnerable due to underdeveloped self-regulation skills and increased sensitivity to social rewards. According to Billieux et al. (2015), mobile phone addiction can be driven by impulsivity, low self-esteem, and the need for constant connectivity.

Impact on Mental Wellbeing

Excessive mobile phone use has been associated with various mental health problems. A systematic review by Domoff et al. (2019) found strong correlations between high screen time and symptoms of anxiety, depression, and poor emotional regulation in children. Overexposure to social media and games can reduce face-to-face interactions, heighten social comparison, and increase susceptibility to cyberbullying—all of which negatively impact self-esteem and emotional health.

Cognitive and Behavioral Effects

Continuous mobile phone use affects attention span, memory, and learning. The constant switching between apps and notifications contributes to fragmented thinking and reduced academic performance. Behavioral problems such as irritability, aggression, and withdrawal are commonly reported among children with problematic phone use (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). The overstimulation from digital content may also desensitize children to real-world stimuli, leading to boredom and restlessness in offline environments.

Sleep Disruption and Physical Health

Screen exposure before bedtime interferes with melatonin production and circadian rhythm, causing delayed sleep onset and poor sleep quality. Sleep deficiency, in turn, exacerbates mental health issues and reduces cognitive functioning. Moreover, prolonged screen use is linked to physical problems such as eye strain, sedentary lifestyle, and obesity, further compounding its negative effects on overall wellbeing (Hale & Guan, 2015).

Parental and Environmental Factors

Parental monitoring, screen-time rules, and digital literacy significantly influence children's phone use behavior. Children lacking supervision or exposed to parental overuse of devices are more likely to exhibit addictive patterns. Environmental stressors such as loneliness, academic pressure, or family conflict can also push children toward escapism via mobile devices. Thus, mobile addiction often reflects a complex interplay of individual, familial, and societal factors.

Preventive Measures and Recommendations

Promoting digital wellbeing requires a balanced approach that incorporates education, regulation, and mental health support. Schools and parents should collaborate to establish screen time guidelines, promote outdoor activities, and provide emotional support. Digital literacy programs that teach children how to use technology responsibly can empower them to make healthy choices. Early interventions such as counseling and behavioral therapy may be necessary for at-risk children.

Conclusion

Mobile phone addiction among children is a growing concern with significant implications for mental health and development. While mobile technology is an integral part of modern life, its excessive use poses risks that must be managed through awareness, regulation, and supportive environments. Ongoing research, education, and community engagement are crucial in developing effective strategies to safeguard children's mental wellbeing in a digital age.

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