

ISSN : To be allotted

RGUHS National Journal of Public Health

(An official publication of Rajiv Gandhi
University of Health Sciences, Karnataka, India)



July 2016 / Vol-1 / Issue - 3

Journal Office: Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Public Health and Centre for Disease Control,
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Editorial

- Technology addiction – An emerging health problem in India** 77
Masthi NRR

Original Articles

- **Shadow beneath the Lamp? The high burden of Diabetes and Hypertension in the workforce of health department, Karnataka, South India** 78
Parimala M, Sasikumar NS, Prafulla S, Deepa R, Yamuna A and Babu GR
- **Review of Rashtriya Bal SwasthaKaryakrama and Utilization of Referral Services in Urban Field Practice Area of Bangalore Medical College** 93
Madhusudhan HN, Kumar IS, Ranganath TS, KS Ravish and Vishwanatha
- **Knowledge and Attitude about Rabies and its prevention among Practicing Physicians in urban Bengaluru** 101
Keshava VE, Rao SS and Masthi NRR
- **Exploring Perspectives on Public Health Nutrition in India: A Qualitative Analysis** 106
Khandelwal S, Srivastava A, Paul T, Nisbett N and Laxminarayan R
- **Voices from the Top of the Pile: Elites' Perceptions on Rural Public Health Care Management in Karnataka State - South India** 118
Nanjunda DC
- **Manuscript** 126
Manuscript submission guide

About the Journal

- RGUHS National Journal of Public Health** 132

Technology addiction –An emerging health problem in India

The modern world with modern technology has dramatically opened up opportunities to countries of the world. The most significant advancement is noticed in the field of communication, especially with the advent of the computers, internet and mobile phones. This has brought people closer to each other. Today, more than ever before, people are finding ways to connect with friends, family members, co workers and those they have just met using various social networking sites online. Decades have passed and today mobile phones have become an inseparable part of one's life along with computers and the internet.

Around 3.42 billion (40%) of the world's population has an internet connection today. There are 460 million Internet users in India as of July 2016 with 34.8 % penetration of the Indian Population and 13.5 % of World Internet Users. However every new technology brings along with it its own set of health problems. Smart phones, computers and internet of late are being linked to ill health and diseases. People are spending more time online than with people in real time.

Over the last few years, there has been mounting concern about the possibility of adverse health effects resulting from exposure to radiofrequency electromagnetic fields, such as those emitted by wireless communication devices. The WHO/International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has classified radiofrequency electromagnetic fields as possibly carcinogenic to humans (Group 2B) based on an increased risk for glioma, a malignant type of brain cancer, associated with wireless phone use.

A more serious issue is the problem of dependence among smart phone users. Children and adolescents have increasing access to smart phones starting as early as two years or even a younger age and are prone for adverse health events. The fast paced life of parents allows them to spend limited quality time with family and usually encourage children to be online to keep them engaged. These are the crucial developmental years. Adults of both sexes are equally prone for addiction. Complications arising out of techno addiction can be both lifestyle as well as health-oriented. The commonly observed physical problems are wrist pain, neck pain,

text neck, shoulder pain, straining of eyes, headache, etc. Decreased sleep, irritability, and restlessness are also common. Addicts have problems with their families, friends, jobs and school environments. A strong positive correlation exists between Internet addiction and depression and anxiety.

Mental health services need to adapt quickly to the changing world that young people inhabit, and how lives are impaired by unregulated time online, on-screen or in-game. Service for Healthy Use of Technology was a clinic set up in April 2014 by National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru to cope with the overpowering and sometimes destructive presence of technology on people and help mostly teenagers hooked to the internet and mobile texting. Screening of school children for technology addiction can be a made a part of school health services.

The fast pace at which electronic media and sites for social networking are changing and offering an increasingly varied number of activities, makes it difficult to keep track of what is good. There is a need for responsible use of technology by people. There is no gold standard scale available for measurement of internet/social media addiction. Thus, what is needed now is a psychometrically validated tool that specifically assesses "social networking addiction. Relatively little research has been done to explain effects of technology on health, particularly addiction in India. Information is needed to see if the problem is only an urban phenomenon or even observed in rural parts of the country. Larger studies covering a wide geographic area to find out the magnitude of problem is need of the hour. There is also a requirement for establishment of De-addiction centres like those available for substance abuse across the country as Social media and Technology addiction is an emerging public health problem.

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