

# **Internet Addiction in Kuwait and Efforts to Control it**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Internet Addiction has reached an epidemic level worldwide. Since the 1990's the Internet has exploded to become an important part of our daily lives. It was best described as a sword with two edges. On one side it brought the whole world to our fingertips. On the other side, the excessive use of it can and will lead to a state of mental disorder hence the term Internet Addiction Disorder IAD. Kuwait, a tiny nation in the Arab Gulf countries was the first in the area to shed some light on the problem in 2009 by conducting a public awareness campaign in the traditional media. Since then, the government, along with other organizations, started to take some measures to control this disorder without any success because most of the measures were restrictive in nature rather than positive. This paper will revisit the Internet addiction scene among university students in Kuwait after 8 years from publishing the first paper as measured by the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) to measure the level of awareness and percentage of highly addicted students compared to the early results, and describe the efforts taking place to control it at the government, organization, and family levels.

**KEYWORDS:** Internet addiction disorder, Internet addiction test, University students, Preventive measures, Kuwait.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Internet Addiction has reached an epidemic level worldwide. Since the 1990's the Internet has exploded to

become an important part of our daily lives. It was best described as a sword with two edges. On one side it brought the whole world to our fingertips and become an undisputed opportunity for social connectedness. On the other side, the excessive use of it can lead to a state of mental and psychological disorder hence the term Internet Addiction Disorder IAD. This paper will shed some light on the Internet addiction problem among university students in the state of Kuwait, measure the level of awareness and the level of addiction among them in two different time periods (2008 and 2016) It will also describe the measures taken to control this disorder or at least stop it from wide-spreading.

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Internet addiction disorder made its first significant appearance in the U.S. press in 1995, when an article written by O'Neill (1) was published in the New York Times. O'Neill quoted addictions specialists and computer industry professionals and likened excessive Internet use to compulsive shopping, exercise, and gambling. The concept did not instantly gain popular interest from journalists, academics, and health professionals until the following year when Kimberly Young presented the results of her research in a paper entitled "Psychology of computer use: XL. Addictive use of the Internet. A case that

breaks the stereotype” (2) and later in her famous book *Caught in the net: how to recognize the signs of Internet addiction--and a winning strategy for recovery* (3).

Many researchers such as Kuss, Griffiths & Binder, (4) indicated that the best way to control Internet addiction is to study its relationship with some personality traits that might predispose individuals to Internet addiction. Higher scores on neuroticism (5) agreeableness and emotional stability (6) have been established as potentially important risk factors for Internet addiction. Others such as Chak & Leung, (7) found shyness, loneliness, anxiety and low self-esteem to increase risks of Internet Addiction. Suler (8) discussed the negative effects of Internet addiction, and stated that "people may lose their jobs, or flunk out school, or are divorced by their spouses because they can't resist devoting all of their time to virtual land. Those people are pathologically addicted". Engelberg and Sjoberg (9) also discussed the consequences and found that the Internet will cut the users off from real social relationships and ultimately lead to weak participation and involvement in social life.

In term of treatment and prevention, Van Rooij et.al (10) found that treating therapists agree that a manual-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Motivational Interviewing (MI) treatment program, such as the 'Lifestyle Training' program, can be suitable for treating internet addiction. Pontes, Kuss, and Griffiths (11) found that both psychological and pharmacological treatments had to be examined in light of existing evidence alongside particular aspects inherent to the patient perspective.

### 3. INTERNET ADDICTION IN KUWAIT

Kuwait, a tiny nation in the Arab Gulf countries was the first in the area to shed some light on the problem in 2009 by conducting a public awareness campaign in the traditional media. Since then, the government, along with other organizations, started to take some measures to control this disorder without any success because most of the measures were restrictive in nature rather than positive.

In 2009 Hamade (12) conducted a study on the use of the Internet among university students across gender at Kuwait University, and measure their awareness and level of addiction to this technology. The results of the study indicated a low level of awareness of Internet addiction among university students. An average of ten percent of students has a high level of addiction that requires treatment, and about 25 percent of them have low level of addiction. Male students were found to be more addicted to the Internet than female students. This is an indication that males in Kuwait enjoy more freedom to spend time outside the house with friends, and visit Internet cafes, game networks, and other places. This freedom enables them to spend more time surfing the Internet, and consequently become more vulnerable to this type of addiction.

In 2016 the author revisited the Internet addiction scene using the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) used by Widyanto & McMurren, (13) and Young & de Adreu,(14) to measure the level of awareness and percentage of highly addicted students compared to the early results. Preliminary results indicated a higher level of awareness and an

increase in the highly addictive students, due to the widespread of mobile Internet and the various social media applications.

**Table 1 Definitions of Internet Addiction among University Students**

<b>Internet Addiction (IA)</b>	<b>2008 Number Percentage</b>	<b>2016 Number Percentage</b>
<b>Heavy use</b>	060 029.4%	<b>089</b> <b>34.9%</b>
<b>Bad Habit</b>	<b>081</b> <b>039.7%</b>	077 31.1%
<b>Psychological Disorder</b>	039 019.0%	068 27.4%
<b>Psycho-Physical Disorder</b>	017 008.3%	011 04.4%
<b>Physical Disorder</b>	007 003.4%	003 01.2%
<b>Total</b>	204 100%	248 100%

Table 1 shows the definition of Internet addiction provided by the students in the sample. It shows a slight change in the definition of addiction where bad habit has the highest score in 2008 and went down to second place in 2016. At the same time Heavy use went up to the top definition. While both of these definitions indicated a limited understanding of the nature of addiction, it is important to notice that psychological disorder was recognized by more than 27 percent of the students, an increase of 8 percent from the (19%) in the year 2008.

Concerning the solution or treatment of Internet addiction, table 2 indicates that psychological therapy was the top choice for treatment in 2016, while in 2008 was preceded by good advice. This is an indication that among those who recognize Addiction as a disorder they

believe that psychological not physical therapy is the solution followed by good advice and medicine.

**Table 2 Treatment of Internet Addiction among University Students**

<b>Internet Addiction (IA)</b>	<b>2008 Number Percentage</b>	<b>2016 Number Percentage</b>
<b>Psychological Therapy</b>	070 34.2%	<b>101</b> <b>40.7%</b>
<b>Advice</b>	<b>088</b> <b>43.2%</b>	074 29.8%
<b>Medicine</b>	013 06.4%	054 21.8%
<b>Physical Therapy</b>	025 12.3%	014 05.7%
<b>Other</b>	03.9%	005 02.0%
<b>Total</b>	204 100%	248 100%

**Table 3 Levels of Internet Addiction among University Students**

<b>Internet Addiction (IA)</b>	<b>2008 Number Percentage</b>	<b>2016 Number Percentage</b>
<b>No Addiction</b>	<b>133</b> <b>65.2%</b>	<b>141</b> <b>56.9%</b>
<b>Low addiction</b>	050 24.5%	073 29.4%
<b>High Addiction</b>	021 10.3%	034 13.7%
<b>Total</b>	204 100%	248 100%

Table 3 represents the level of addiction among students in the sample. According to table 3, the number of highly addicted students increased by almost four percent between 2008 and 2016. That is an average of 0.5 percent annually. Also the number of low addicted students went up more than five percent while the students with no addiction symptoms decreased by about 9 percent indicating that the addiction

level in general (low and high) had increased to 9 percent.

#### 4. EFFORTS TO CONTROL INTERNET ADDICTION

The growing concern about the risks of Internet addiction lead to discussions among academics and researchers on the best way or ways to deal with the problem and the highly addicted person and take measures to control it or at least stop it from wide spreading.

Early measures taken to control the increase in Internet Addiction among youth in Kuwait were restrictive in nature. At the government level the ministry of Communication demanded the Internet Service providers (ISP) to install very restrictive filters to control the contents of the web by blocking most of the websites frequently or heavily used by users such as pornographic sites, online gambling sites, and even online gaming sites. The filters were so restrictive to a degree of over-blocking many medical, health and educational sites because some pictures or texts that were considered inappropriate to the general audiences, especially to children and youths. ISP companies faced a dilemma if they tighten their filters they lose customers who complain about the restrictive filters and if they loosen their filters the government will punish them with fines and closure.

Many organizations also took some measures to reduce the heavy use of the Internet among their employees by installing additional filters on their networks blocking many websites and disabling many features and applications such as games and chatting. These organization believe that many employees are wasting company work-

hours by doing activities not related to work that lead to low level of performance.

Many families in Kuwait took additional measures for the protection of their children from harmful materials and overuse of Internet activities. Some of them (14.5%) installed Internet filtering software on the home computers or network and took some restrictive measures such restricting the hours for using the Internet or mediating in their children use of the internet by checking websites visited, emails, chats and take counter measures by forbidding their children from spending much time on the Internet, blocking inappropriate websites from porn to gambling to websites inducing crimes, hate, and terrorism even online games and peer-to-peer websites.

**Table 4 Parental Strategies to deal with Internet Addiction**

Strategy	Number Percentage
Order child to avoid certain websites	123 81%
Forbid child from using the Internet unsupervised	117 77%
Restrict time of using the Internet	089 59%
Discuss appropriate use of the Internet	069 45%
Discuss the danger and safety of the Internet	062 41%
Make specific rules to use the Internet	058 38%

Table 4 explains the strategies adopted by some families to protect their children from viewing inappropriate materials and becoming Internet addicts. The three highest measures adopted by parents were restrictive in nature forcing children to obey them. They include ordering children to avoid certain websites (81%),

forbidding them from using the internet alone (77%) and restricting time spent surfing the Internet (59%). On the other hand, the positive measures such as discussing appropriate Internet use and the danger and safety of the Internet were in the lower percentage of the table (45% and 41% respectively).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper shed some light on the Internet addiction problem in the state of Kuwait, and described some of the measures adopted at the government, organization and parental levels. It is clear from this study and other related studies that Internet addiction is a growing problem that is not going to be resolved, and the most that can be done is to alleviate the problem, slow down its progress, and prevent it from spreading, especially among children and youths. As an Information scientist it is my duty to provide all the necessary information available in the literature and let the professionals in the medical, psychological and sociological fields find suitable solutions. However, there is no one solution that fits all. Every country and every society has its own characteristics and sequences and the solutions should be through combined efforts of the medical, sociological, psychological fields in addition to the religious efforts by strengthening the religious belief of the Internet addicts and getting closer to God.

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