



DIGITAL

DETOX AND INTERNET ADDICTION



Introduction

The lecture session was initiated by Manjiri Deshmukh, who welcomed everyone and then handed over the proceedings to Ganesh Rajan, the coordinator of the self-help support group and a member of the Eklavya Foundation.

He introduced the guest speaker, Dr. Mohan Raj, a consultant psychiatrist based in Chennai with over two and a half decades of clinical experience.



Dr. Mohan Raj completed his MBBS from Stanley Medical College, Chennai, and went on to pursue his MD in Psychiatry along with a DNB from NIMHANS, Bangalore. He has received several prestigious recognitions, including the Jayaram Award for the best research paper and the P.V. Subramaniam Gold Medal for proficiency in psychiatry.

He has been actively involved in spreading mental health awareness through lectures, workshops in schools and corporate settings, and various media platforms such as print, radio, television, and the internet.

Since February 2022, he has also been regularly publishing mental health awareness videos on YouTube through his channel "Mindscape Matters." The audience was warmly welcomed to gain insights from his expertise on the growing issue of addiction, particularly digital addiction

Beginning of the Session

Dr. Mohan Raj began his session by expressing his gratitude to the Eklavya Foundation, Ganesh Rajan, and Manjiri Deshmukh for organizing the lecture and inviting him. He mentioned that it was a pleasure to interact with the participants. He introduced the concept of digital detox and discussed its importance in today's technologically driven world. He explained that although the topic is broad, he would focus on key aspects such as causes, symptoms, and consequences of excessive internet usage.

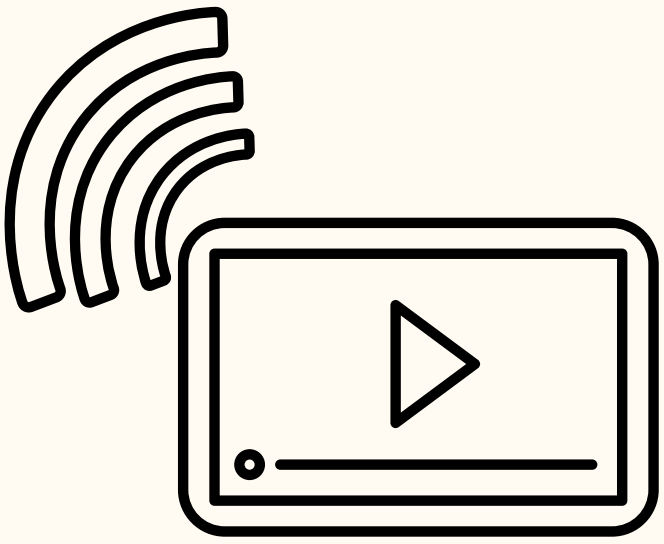
Interactive Assessment

To engage the audience, Dr. Mohan Raj asked several reflective questions in the form of a case-based questionnaire. These included questions such as whether individuals feel annoyed when others criticize their internet usage, whether they experience guilt about the time spent online, and whether they feel the urge to check updates immediately after waking up. These questions helped participants reflect on their own behaviors and identify patterns of excessive digital engagement. He also pointed out a common observation among doctors, where patients often interrupt consultations to check their phones, highlighting the growing dependency on mobile devices.

Historical Perspective of Internet Usage

Dr. Mohan Raj explained the evolution of internet usage through three key phases. The first phase began around 1995, when the internet became accessible to the general public, including in India, whereas earlier it was mainly limited to laboratories and universities. During this period, excessive usage was mostly seen in gaming, with children spending long hours in internet cafés. The second phase started around 2007 with the introduction of smartphones, which made the internet easily accessible anytime and anywhere, leading to increased usage. The third phase, around 2023–2024, is marked by the rise of artificial intelligence, where individuals increasingly rely on digital tools for information and interaction, further contributing to dependency and potential addiction.

Features of Internet Addiction



The speaker elaborated on the key features of internet addiction. One of the primary features is salience, where internet use becomes the most important activity in an individual's life. Another feature is mood modification, where individuals experience pleasure or relief due to dopamine release triggered by notifications or engaging content.

Over time, tolerance develops, meaning individuals need to spend more time online to achieve the same level of satisfaction. Withdrawal symptoms are also observed when individuals are unable to access the internet, leading to irritability, restlessness, and discomfort. Additionally, excessive internet use leads to procrastination and neglect of daily responsibilities, particularly among youngsters who spend long hours gaming or using social media.

Forms of Digital Addiction

Dr. Mohan Raj discussed various forms of digital addiction prevalent today. These include excessive use of social media platforms such as Instagram, addiction to online gaming, and mindless consumption of short-form content like reels and videos, which negatively affect attention span. He also highlighted addiction to continuous news consumption, online gambling, stock trading, shopping, and pornography. Each of these forms of addiction has distinct psychological and behavioral consequences, contributing to overall mental health concerns.

Consequences of Excessive Internet Usage

The speaker emphasized several negative consequences of excessive internet usage. One of the most significant impacts is on time management, as individuals lose valuable time that could be utilized for productive activities. It also leads to distraction and a reduced attention span.



Impact on Sleep and Health

Dr. Mohan Raj explained the scientific impact of screen exposure on sleep. He described how blue light from digital devices affects the brain's sleep cycle by interfering with melatonin production. Light entering the eyes travels through the visual pathway to the occipital cortex and crosses at the optic chiasma to reach the suprachiasmatic nucleus, which regulates circadian rhythms. This process signals the pineal gland to control melatonin secretion. Exposure to screen light, especially at night, suppresses melatonin production, making the brain perceive it as daytime, thereby delaying sleep. Sleep deprivation, in turn, affects cognitive functioning, immune response, appetite, mood, skin health, and cardiovascular health.

One of the most impactful statements made during the lecture was, **"You had a great life, but you were looking down at your phone and missed it,"** highlighting how excessive digital engagement can lead to missing meaningful real-life experiences.

Management Strategies

To manage digital addiction, Dr. Mohan Raj suggested several practical strategies. The first and most important step is awareness of the problem. Individuals should monitor their screen time and set limits on device usage. Gradual reduction in usage is recommended rather than sudden restriction. Establishing household rules, such as gadget-free times, can also be beneficial. He encouraged engaging in alternative activities like reading, exercising, and pursuing hobbies. Increasing face-to-face social interactions instead of relying solely on digital communication was also emphasized as an important step.

Question and Answer Session

During the question-and-answer session, participants raised several important queries. One question addressed whether older individuals also experience digital addiction, to which Dr. Mohan Raj responded that while it affects all age groups, it is more prevalent among youngsters.


Another question focused on how individuals can transition from an active state to sleep quickly. He advised that sleep should be pre-planned, recommending that individuals avoid using mobile phones at least one hour before bedtime and instead engage in calming activities such as reading. When asked about medication, he explained that while certain medications like N-acetylcysteine (NAC) and Naltrexone may sometimes be used, their effectiveness varies, and there is no specific medication for digital addiction. He emphasized that personal motivation and behavioral changes are the most crucial factors in overcoming this issue.

The session concluded with Ganesh Rajan expressing his gratitude to Dr. Mohan Raj for delivering an insightful and informative lecture. Overall, the lecture provided a comprehensive understanding of digital addiction, its causes, effects, and management strategies, highlighting the importance of maintaining a balanced relationship with technology in today's digital age.

This report was prepared and Designed by Sneha Singh, a second-year student of the BSc in Mental Health program of Symbiosis College. Intern at Eklavya Foundation for Mental Health

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