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Gender Differences in Social Media Addiction and Psychological Well-Being Among Adolescents: Evidence from Chhattisgarh, India

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Abstract

Background: Social media addiction has become a major public health issue for teenagers around the world, with increasing evidence pointing to its harmful effects on mental health. Yet, we still know surprisingly little about how this addiction affects boys and girls differently, especially in India.
Objectives: This study aimed to explore those gender differences in social media addiction and psychological well-being among adolescents in Chhattisgarh, India. It also looked into how gender might influence the connection between social media addiction and various psychological outcomes, such as overall well-being, emotional expression, anxiety about death, body image, and the need for psychological counselling.
Methods: To conduct this research, we gathered a sample of 240 adolescents aged 15 to 19 years, consisting of 120 social media addicts and 120 non-addicts, with an equal split of 120 males and 120 females. Participants were selected from academic institutions across Chhattisgarh using purposive and stratified sampling methods. We used a 2×2 factorial independent group design, focusing on Gender (Male vs. Female) and Addiction Status (Addict vs. Non-Addict) as our independent variables. Each participant completed six validated psychological assessment tools that are culturally relevant. We analysed the data using two-way ANOVA, Tukey HSD post-hoc tests, estimated marginal means, and omega-squared effect sizes.
Results: The impact of Addiction Status was strikingly significant across all six dependent variables (all $p<.001$), with partial eta-squared values between .721 and .910. This clearly highlights the severe and far-reaching psychological effects of social media addiction in various areas of life. On the other hand, the effect of Gender was only significant for Death Anxiety ($F(1, 236) = 31.850$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2p = .119$), showing that females reported notably higher levels of death anxiety compared to males. We also found significant interaction effects between Gender and Addiction Status for Social Media Addiction ($\eta^2p = .050$), Well-Being ($\eta^2p = .070$), Emotional Expression ($\eta^2p = .056$), Death Anxiety ($\eta^2p = .016$), and the Need for Psychological Counselling ($\eta^2p = .074$). This indicates a consistent pattern where female addicts experienced more intense psychological challenges than their male counterparts, while female non-addicts tended to have equal or even better psychological well-being compared to male non-addicts.
Conclusions: Social media addiction has a particularly harsh impact on the mental health of adolescent girls, undermining their natural psychological strengths and leading to more intense and widespread psychological issues compared to their male counterparts. It's crucial that we adopt gender-sensitive strategies for preventing and addressing social media addiction among Indian teenagers.

Keywords: Social media addiction, gender differences, psychological well-being, adolescents, India, Chhattisgarh, emotional expression, death anxiety, body image, two-way ANOVA

1. Introduction

The rapid rise of social media platforms and the surge in smartphone use among teenagers over the last ten years has sparked growing worries about the psychological effects of excessive social media use. This behavior, increasingly referred to in academic circles as social media addiction, raises important questions about its impact on the mental health, emotional growth, academic performance, and

relationships of young people around the globe (Andreassen *et al*., 2016; Van den Eijnden *et al*., 2016) [1, 21]. While we have a solid understanding of the negative psychological effects linked to social media addiction-such as depression, anxiety, lower well-being, negative body image, and poor academic results-the extent to which these effects are equally severe for boys and girls, or how gender might influence the way social media addiction impacts various aspects of psychological health, has not been thoroughly explored, especially in the context of India (Awasthi & Verma, 2017; Bashir & Ahmad, 2017) [2, 3].

The idea that gender might influence the psychological effects of social media addiction is pretty well-known. Boys and girls tend to use social media for different reasons and in distinct ways. For instance, girls are more inclined to use these platforms for social connections, emotional support, self-presentation, and comparing their appearances, while boys often turn to social media for information, gaming, and entertainment (Chua & Chang, 2016; Patil, 2018) [11, 17]. These differences in how males and females engage with social media could lead to varying levels of vulnerability to addiction and different types of psychological harm when addiction occurs. This calls for research designs that are sensitive to gender, allowing us to identify and understand these unique effects (Andreassen *et al*., 2016; Awasthi & Verma, 2017) [1, 2].

When it comes to existing studies on gender differences in social media addiction, the results have been quite mixed. Some research indicates that women may experience higher rates of addiction (Andreassen *et al*., 2016) [1], while other studies suggest that men might be more affected (Prabhakaran *et al*., 2016; Younes *et al*., 2016) [18, 24]. There are also studies that find no significant differences between genders at all. These inconsistencies likely stem from various factors, including cultural context, the methods used for assessment, and the specific social media activities being examined. This underscores the need for gender-sensitive research that takes into account specific cultural and demographic contexts, rather than relying solely on findings from Western or other non-Indian populations to understand gender differences in social media addiction among Indian adolescents (Patil, 2018; Malhotra *et al*., 2014) [17, 16].

This study aims to fill a significant gap by exploring how gender influences social media addiction and its connection to six psychological outcomes: Well-Being, Emotional Expression, Death Anxiety, Body Image, the Need for Psychological Counseling, and Social Media Addiction itself. It focuses on adolescents in Chhattisgarh, India, using a detailed 2×2 factorial experimental design. This approach allows for a thorough analysis of the main effects of Gender and Addiction Status, as well as their interaction on all six psychological variables. By examining gender differences within the unique socio-cultural and demographic landscape of Chhattisgarh, the research provides valuable insights that can help shape gender-sensitive prevention and intervention strategies for tackling social media addiction among Indian teens.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gender Differences in Social Media Addiction Prevalence

The research on gender differences in social media addiction presents a mixed bag of results that really depend on the context. For instance, a large-scale study by Andreassen *et al*. (2016) [1] in Norway revealed that women were significantly more likely than men to be labeled as social media addicts. This gender gap in addiction rates was linked to women's tendency to use social media for emotional connections and self-presentation. On the flip side, Prabhakaran *et al*. (2016) [18] discovered that male school students in India showed higher rates of Internet and social media addiction, while Younes *et al*. (2016) [24] found similar trends among male university students in Lebanon. These conflicting results across various cultural settings indicate that the patterns of gender differences in social media addiction can shift based on cultural norms, the specific platforms and activities being examined, and the demographic traits of the participants involved. This underscores the need for research that is specifically tailored to India, as we can't just assume that findings from Western or other non-Indian contexts will apply directly to Indian populations (Patil, 2018; Bashir & Ahmad, 2017) [17, 3].

2.2 Gender Differences in Psychological Consequences

While studies on gender differences in social media addiction have yielded mixed results, the research on the psychological effects of this addiction tends to show a clearer picture. It appears that female social media users often face more significant and varied psychological challenges compared to their male peers. For instance, Awasthi and Verma (2017) [2] found that in India, women who are addicted to the Internet reported higher rates of mental health issues than men, aligning with a broader trend in mental health research that highlights adolescent girls' greater psychological vulnerability. Chua and Chang (2016) [11] pointed out that adolescent girls on Instagram experience heightened anxiety related to social comparisons and dissatisfaction with their body image. This is particularly concerning given that Instagram is all about showcasing images and comparing oneself to others, which is especially prevalent among female users. Additionally, Woods and Scott (2016) [23] discovered that social media use among adolescent girls is more closely linked to low self-esteem than it is for boys, indicating that the negative self-assessment stemming from compulsive social media use may hit female users harder. These findings support the idea that social media addiction taps into the unique psychological vulnerabilities of adolescent girls-such as their tendency to compare themselves to others, focus on appearance, and seek emotional connections-resulting in more severe and widespread psychological damage than what boys typically experience (Fardouly *et al*., 2015; Vogel *et al*., 2014) [12, 22].

2.3 Gender, Social Media, and Body Image

The influence of social media on body image has become a hot topic in research, especially when it comes to the experiences of teenage girls. Fardouly *et al*. (2015) [12] found solid experimental evidence showing that using Facebook can lead to body image dissatisfaction, largely due to social comparison, with women being more susceptible to this than men. Similarly, Vogel *et al*. (2014) [22] showed that when people are exposed to social media profiles of attractive peers, it can negatively impact their self-evaluations,

particularly regarding their appearance. In India, the clash between global beauty ideals showcased on visually-driven platforms and traditional cultural norms surrounding female beauty creates a complicated and potentially harmful environment for young girls. They face the pressure to meet both Western ideals of thinness and glamour, as well as Indian expectations of fairness and modesty, which can lead to heightened anxiety about their appearance and body dissatisfaction (Malhotra *et al*., 2014; Chua & Chang, 2016) [16, 11].

2.4 Research Gaps

Even though there's a growing pile of research on how gender impacts social media addiction and its psychological effects, there are still some significant gaps in what we know. For starters, most studies have only looked at a narrow range of psychological outcomes-usually just depression, anxiety, and self-esteem-while overlooking other crucial areas like emotional expression, fear of death, and the need for psychological counseling. Additionally, there aren't many studies that use factorial experimental designs, which would allow researchers to explore the main effects of gender and addiction status together, as well as how they interact. This makes it tough to figure out if the gender differences we see are due to independent gender effects, how addiction impacts different genders, or a mix of both. Lastly, research focused on gender differences in social media addiction in India is still quite sparse, especially in non-metropolitan areas like Chhattisgarh. This study aims to fill those gaps by looking at gender differences across six psychological outcomes using a solid factorial design specifically in the context of Chhattisgarh.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Design and Sample

In this study, we used a 2×2 factorial independent group design, looking at two main factors: Gender (Male vs. Female) and Social Media Addiction Status (Addict vs. Non-Addict). We also examined six psychological variables as our dependent variables. Our sample included 240 adolescents, aged 15 to 19, who were recruited from various academic institutions in both urban and semi-urban areas of Chhattisgarh. We used a two-stage purposive and stratified sampling method to ensure a diverse group. The participants were evenly split into four experimental groups: Male Addict (n = 60), Male Non-Addict (n = 60), Female Addict (n = 60), and Female Non-Addict (n = 60). This setup allowed us to maintain a balanced factorial design, maximizing our statistical power to explore the interaction effects between Gender and Addiction Status.

3.2 Assessment Instruments

To assess social media addiction, we used the Social Media Addiction Checklist created by Chouhan and Joshi in 2016 [7]. This 20-item self-report tool evaluates how often and intensely individuals engage with social media, as well as the behavioral impacts of that usage. It has proven reliable and valid for Indian adolescents. Those who scored above the cut-off point of 40 were identified as social media addicts. Additionally, all participants filled out five other validated assessment tools that measured various aspects such as Well-Being (Chouhan & Sharma, 2015) [8], Emotional Expression (Chouhan & Bhatnagar, 2002) [6], Death Anxiety (Chouhan & Tiwari, 2003) [10], Body Image (Chouhan & Surana, 2000) [9], and the Need for Psychological Counseling (Chouhan & Arora, 2009) [5], all tailored specifically for Indian populations. We also gathered demographic and background information through a Personal Information Schedule (Chouhan & Joshi, 2016) [7], which included details like age, gender, education level, where they live, how many hours they spend on social media daily, when they first started using it, their main platform, academic performance, and the level of parental supervision they receive.

3.3 Statistical Analysis

In this study, we carried out statistical analyses using IBM SPSS Version 26.0. We employed a two-way ANOVA to explore how Gender and Addiction Status independently and interactively influenced each dependent variable. When we found significant main or interaction effects, we followed up with Tukey HSD post-hoc tests. To gauge the effect sizes, we calculated partial eta-squared (η^2p) and partial omega-squared (ω^2p), with the latter being a more reliable estimator of the true effect size in the population. We also computed estimated marginal means (EMMs) to give us model-adjusted estimates of how different groups performed. For assumption testing, we conducted Shapiro-Wilk tests for normality, Levene's tests to check for homogeneity of variance, and Mardia's test for multivariate normality. Additionally, we ran Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric tests as sensitivity analyses to ensure the robustness of our parametric findings.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The study was given the green light by the Institutional Ethics Committee at Monad University. We made sure to get informed consent from all participants who were 18 and older, and for those under 18, we obtained parental consent along with the participant's agreement. Everyone involved was guaranteed that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous, and they were free to participate voluntarily, with the option to withdraw at any time.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The average age of the entire sample was 17.1 years (with a standard deviation of 1.3), and there were no significant age differences among the four experimental groups ($F(3, 236) = 0.42$, $p = .738$), which confirms that the groups were age-matched. Social media addicts reported using social media significantly more each day (Male Addict: M = 6.8 hours/day; Female Addict: M = 7.2 hours/day) compared to non-addicts (Male Non-Addict: M = 2.1 hours/day; Female Non-Addict: M = 1.9 hours/day). Additionally, addicts started using social media at a younger age (addicts: M = 12.2 years; non-addicts: M = 13.7 years). Among female addicts, Instagram was the most popular platform (55.0%), while WhatsApp was the go-to choice for non-addicts of both genders. Academic performance was significantly lower for addicts (M = 5.8/10) compared to non-addicts (M = 7.4/10), and 55% of addicts reported having low parental supervision, in contrast to just 15% of non-addicts.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 showcases the average scores and standard deviations for all six dependent variables across the four experimental groups. Addicts consistently reported more negative psychological profiles compared to non-addicts across all six variables, showing significant differences in mean scores between the groups. Among the addict groups, female addicts exhibited the most severe psychological profiles, with the lowest Well-Being score (M = 39.50), the lowest Emotional Expression (M = 28.90), the highest Death Anxiety (M = 48.30), the lowest Body Image (M = 24.70), and the highest need for Psychological Counselling (M = 48.20) of all four groups. On the other hand, within the non-addict groups, female non-addicts displayed the most positive psychological profiles, scoring highest on Well-Being (M = 78.80), Emotional Expression (M = 61.60), and the lowest need for Psychological Counselling (M = 19.90).

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent Variables by Group

Variable	Male Addict M (SD)	Male Non-Addict M (SD)	Female Addict M (SD)	Female Non-Addict M (SD)
Social Media Addiction	47.48 (5.92)	18.40 (4.37)	50.95 (5.84)	17.35 (3.31)
Well-Being	43.00 (7.20)	75.00 (6.70)	39.50 (7.14)	78.80 (5.80)
Emotional Expression	31.40 (6.41)	58.40 (5.28)	28.90 (7.06)	61.60 (4.44)
Death Anxiety	41.70 (7.23)	22.10 (5.36)	48.30 (8.12)	25.30 (5.67)
Body Image	25.30 (6.28)	48.10 (5.70)	24.70 (6.51)	47.60 (5.78)
Psych. Counselling Need	44.60 (5.97)	22.60 (5.70)	48.20 (6.16)	19.90 (4.48)

Note: N per group = 60

4.3 Two-Way ANOVA Results

Table 2 showcases the results of the two-way ANOVA for all six dependent variables. The main effect of Addiction Status was found to be highly significant across the board for all six variables (all $p<.001$), with impressive partial eta-squared values that ranged from .721 for Death Anxiety to .910 for Social Media Addiction. Interestingly, the main effect of Gender was only significant for Death Anxiety ($F(1, 236) = 31.850$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2p = .119$). Additionally, we observed significant interaction effects between Gender and Addiction Status for five of the variables.

Table 2: Two-Way ANOVA Summary - Gender × Addiction Status Effects

Variable	Effect	F	df	p	η^2p	ω^2p
Social Media Addiction	Gender	3.535	1,236	.061	.015	.010
	Addiction Status	2378.531	1,236	<.001***	.910	.910
	Interaction	12.349	1,236	.001**	.050	.050
Well-Being	Gender	0.033	1,236	.856	.000	.000
	Addiction Status	1682.609	1,236	<.001***	.877	.880
	Interaction	17.710	1,236	<.001***	.070	.070
Emotional Expression	Gender	0.277	1,236	.599	.001	.000
	Addiction Status	1545.142	1,236	<.001***	.868	.870
	Interaction	14.070	1,236	<.001***	.056	.050
Death Anxiety	Gender	31.850	1,236	<.001***	.119	.110
	Addiction Status	609.444	1,236	<.001***	.721	.720
	Interaction	3.911	1,236	.049*	.016	.010
Body Image	Gender	0.506	1,236	.478	.002	.000
	Addiction Status	849.841	1,236	<.001***	.783	.780
	Interaction	0.001	1,236	.975	.000	.000
Psych. Counselling Need	Gender	0.476	1,236	.491	.002	.000
	Addiction Status	1204.679	1,236	<.001***	.836	.830
	Interaction	18.873	1,236	<.001***	.074	.070

Note: * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$

4.4 Post-Hoc Analyses: Gender Differences Within Addiction Status Groups

The Tukey HSD post-hoc analyses shed light on the distinct gender differences observed within each addiction status group. Among the addict groups, female addicts outperformed their male counterparts in several areas: they scored significantly higher on Social Media Addiction (mean difference = 3.467, p = .001), Death Anxiety (mean difference = 6.583, $p<.001$), and the need for Psychological Counselling (mean difference = 3.650, p = .003). Conversely, they scored notably lower on Well-Being (mean difference = −3.500, p = .025). When it came to Emotional Expression (mean difference = −2.45, p = .106) and Body Image (mean difference = −0.583, p = .953), the differences between female and male addicts were not significant.

In the non-addict groups, female non-addicts also had the upper hand, scoring significantly higher than male non-addicts in Well-Being (mean difference = 3.817, p = .011) and Emotional Expression (mean difference = 3.250, p = .015). They were marginally lower in Psychological Counselling Need (mean difference = −2.650, p = .050). The differences between female and male non-addicts regarding Social Media Addiction (mean difference = −1.050, p = .656), Death Anxiety (mean difference = 3.167, p = .049), and Body Image (mean difference = −0.533, p = .963) were either not significant or only marginally significant.

Table 3: Summary of Gender Differences within Addiction Status Groups (Tukey HSD)

Variable	Female vs Male Addict Mean Diff	p	Female vs Male Non-Addict Mean Diff	p
Social Media Addiction	+3.467	.001**	−1.050	.656
Well-Being	−3.500	.025*	+3.817	.011*
Emotional Expression	−2.450	.106	+3.250	.015*
Death Anxiety	+6.583	<.001***	+3.167	.049*
Body Image	−0.583	.953	−0.533	.963
Psych. Counselling Need	+3.650	.003**	−2.650	.050

Note: Positive values = Female > Male; * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$

4.5 Estimated Marginal Means

The estimated marginal means really highlighted the crossover interaction pattern for most of the variables. It turns out that female addicts tend to have the most challenging psychological profiles, while female non-addicts show the most positive ones. The EMM profile showed that the differences between genders within the addict group were most pronounced for Death Anxiety (Female Addict EMM = 48.30 compared to Male Addict EMM = 41.70, a difference of 6.60) and the need for Psychological Counseling (Female Addict EMM = 48.20 versus Male Addict EMM = 44.60, a difference of 3.60). This suggests that these two factors are particularly influenced by gender when it comes to social media addiction.

5. Discussion

5.1 Gender Differences in Social Media Addiction

The discovery that female addicts scored notably higher than their male counterparts on the Social Media Addiction Checklist (with a mean difference of 3.467 and a p-value of .001) aligns with the findings of Andreassen *et al*. (2016) [1], which revealed that women are significantly more prone to developing severe social media addiction and tend to score higher on addiction metrics when they do. This notable gender difference in addiction severity among those who are addicted - but not among those who aren't - is highlighted by a significant interaction effect ($\eta^2p = .050$). It suggests that the factors contributing to more intense social media addiction in girls are specifically tied to their addictive use, rather than just reflecting a higher overall engagement with social media. The increased severity of addiction among female addict's likely stems from the crucial role social media plays in the social and emotional lives of adolescent girls. It serves as a key platform for social comparison, self-presentation, seeking peer validation, and forming social connections, which are more integral to girls' social identities and psychological well-being than they are for boys (Chua & Chang, 2016; Patil, 2018) [11, 17].

5.2 Gender Differences in Psychological Well-Being

The crossover interaction pattern observed in the study regarding Well-Being is quite striking-female addicts scored notably lower than their male counterparts, while female non-addicts scored significantly higher than male non-addicts. This finding is particularly important because it suggests that social media addiction has a unique and detrimental effect on the psychological well-being of adolescent girls. It flips the advantage that non-addicted girls typically have over non-addicted boys, leading to a well-being deficit that is even more pronounced than what addicted boys experience. This aligns with Awasthi and Verma's (2017) [2] observation that female Internet addicts tend to face more mental health challenges than males, and it echoes Twenge and Campbell's (2018) [20] conclusion that the negative effects of social media use on well-being are more pronounced for girls. The reason behind this greater impact on girls likely stems from the harmful influence of appearance-related social comparisons and the need for social validation on image-centric platforms like Instagram. These behaviors are more common and psychologically significant among addicted girls compared to addicted boys, ultimately undermining key aspects of subjective well-being such as self-esteem, positive emotions, and overall life satisfaction (Fardouly *et al*., 2015; Primack *et al*., 2017) [12, 19].

5.3 Gender Differences in Death Anxiety

The discovery of a notable Gender main effect for Death Anxiety ($\eta^2p = .119$) - where female participants reported significantly higher levels of death anxiety than their male counterparts across both addiction status groups - aligns with the well-documented trend in psychological research that shows women and girls tend to experience greater death anxiety. This is often linked to gender-specific socialization, heightened emotional sensitivity, and generally higher anxiety levels among females (Chouhan & Tiwari, 2003) [10]. Additionally, the marginally significant interaction effect for Death Anxiety indicates that social media addiction intensifies this existing gender disparity - with female addicts exhibiting particularly high death anxiety (M = 48.30) compared to male addicts (M = 41.70). This 6.583-point difference is notably larger than the 3.167-point gender gap seen in non-addicts. It seems that social media addiction may widen the gender gap in death anxiety, likely due to the increased exposure of addicted girls to distressing mortality-related content on social media - such as news about violent deaths, accidents, and disasters - and the heightened emotional sensitivity that adolescent girls have towards such material (Krylova, 2017; Burke *et al*., 2010) [14, 4].

5.4 Gender Differences in Emotional Expression

The subtle gender differences in emotional expression among non-addicted individuals, despite a significant interaction effect, highlight a complex and clinically relevant trend. Non-addicted girls show a notably higher capacity for emotional expression compared to their non-addicted male counterparts (mean difference = 3.250, p = .015). This aligns with existing research on gender disparities in emotional intelligence and expressiveness (Patil, 2018) [17]. However, this advantage for girls disappears when social media addiction is in the picture, as addicted girls exhibit levels of emotional suppression and

dysregulation that are on par with those of addicted boys. This suggests that social media addiction dampens the emotional expression benefits that girls typically have over boys, leading to similar emotional challenges for both genders in the context of addiction. These findings carry significant implications for creating gender-sensitive therapeutic approaches aimed at addressing the emotional regulation issues linked to social media addiction (Bashir & Ahmad, 2017; Chouhan & Bhatnagar, 2002) [3, 6].

5.5 Gender and Body Image

The study reveals some pretty eye-opening findings about gender differences in Body Image scores. Interestingly, there were no significant differences within the addict group ($p = .953$) or the non-addict group ($p = .963$). This suggests that the impact of social media addiction on body image is just as serious for both male and female adolescents. It goes against the common belief that social media's negative effects on body image mainly affect girls. This insight is crucial for clinical practice, highlighting the need for body image assessments and interventions to be part of treatment programs for social media addiction, regardless of gender, rather than focusing solely on girls (Fardouly *et al*., 2015; Vogel *et al*., 2014) [12, 22].

5.6 Gender Differences in Psychological Counselling Need

The study revealed a significant interaction effect for Psychological Counselling Need ($\eta^2p = .074$), which was the largest interaction effect size found. It showed that female addicts have a notably higher level of unmet psychological counselling needs compared to their male counterparts (mean difference = 3.650, $p = .003$). Interestingly, there was no significant difference in counselling needs between female and male non-addicts. This finding highlights the more severe psychological challenges faced by female addicts in various areas, including greater addiction severity, lower well-being, heightened death anxiety, and limited emotional expression. It emphasizes the urgent need for developing and implementing gender-sensitive counselling services tailored for social media-addicted adolescent girls, not just in Chhattisgarh but throughout India (Awasthi & Verma, 2017; Lan & Lee, 2012) [2, 15].

6. Conclusions and Implications

The current study offers strong and thorough evidence highlighting how gender plays a crucial role in influencing the psychological effects of social media addiction among teenagers in Chhattisgarh. The consistent pattern of interactions between Gender and Addiction Status observed across five out of six dependent variables shows that female addicts tend to experience more severe psychological challenges compared to their male counterparts. Interestingly, female non-addicts perform just as well, if not better, than male non-addicts. This suggests that social media addiction particularly harms the mental health and overall functioning of adolescent girls, effectively reversing their natural psychological advantages and creating a significant psychological burden that is more intense and widespread than what boys face.

These findings have some significant implications for various fields, including research, clinical practice, educational policy, and public health. For researchers, it's crucial to recognize the role of gender as a key factor in studies about social media addiction and its effects. Instead of just comparing average outcomes between genders, they should use factorial designs that can capture both main and interaction effects. Clinicians and school counselors should take note, as these findings highlight the pressing need for gender-sensitive assessments and interventions that cater to the unique psychological challenges faced by female social media addicts. This includes addressing their heightened death anxiety, struggles with emotional expression, poor well-being, and significant unmet counseling needs. For educators and school administrators, the results strongly advocate for gender-sensitive digital literacy programs that tackle the social comparison, self-presentation, and validation-seeking behaviors that can lead to more severe social media addiction and its repercussions among adolescent girls. Lastly, for policymakers and public health officials, these findings present a compelling case for recognizing the distinct psychological toll of social media addiction on different genders, emphasizing the need to invest in mental health services, prevention programs, and regulatory measures that specifically safeguard the mental well-being of adolescent girls in today's digital landscape.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

The current study does have a few limitations that we need to recognize. First off, the cross-sectional design means we can't really draw any conclusions about cause and effect when it comes to the relationships between gender, addiction, and psychological outcomes. Also, since the sample is limited to Chhattisgarh, it makes it harder to apply these findings to other states in India or different cultural settings. Plus, relying on self-reported assessments can lead to some social desirability bias. For future research, it would be beneficial to use longitudinal designs to track how gender differences in social media addiction develop over time, qualitative methods to dive deeper into the experiences of male and female addicts, and comparative designs to see how the gender-specific patterns we've identified play out in various cultural and socioeconomic contexts across India.

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