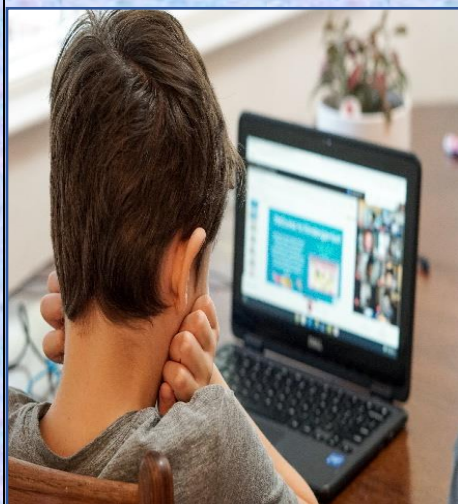


## Internet Overuse Among School-Goers During Pandemic

**-Somdatta Chattopadhyay**



The internet is a huge blessing for our times. It gave us the privilege of staying connected to our loved ones at least virtually, and maintain continuity in the process of teaching-learning at a time when the world grappled with fears around the threat of viral invasion, death and extreme loneliness. It gave us the much-needed assurance that we were not alone in this struggle. Yet it's inadvertent overuse during COVID times gave rise to a whole host of difficulties amongst the student community. While long hours in front of the screen has lead some students to experience eyesight problems, others have been left with a persistent inability to sustain attention during online classes. Additionally, the internet was used as a shared medium for submitting work assignments as well as engaging in leisure activities such as social networking or gaming.

Students often found this overlap difficult to deal with, leading to further distractibility and absenteeism. Consequently, the practice of writing using pen and paper was also disrupted. As a result, the schools that have switched to the offline mode of functioning are now reporting problems with reference to young children not completing board work and other written assignments.

For students entering adolescence and puberty, peer opinion and approval often plays a pivotal role in shaping their self esteem and worldview. A mere possibility of a technical glitch or a delayed/ deprecating response from a friend could make them feel isolated and cut off from the rest of the world. The inability to communicate or a feeling of being unheard, even though virtual networks may contribute remarkably to increased levels of stress, anxiety and depression coupled with an acute intolerance for the slightest uncertainty, making solitude look like a bottomless abyss of self hate and constant negative self talk.

Such an overriding dependence on a forum as hypothetical and elusive as the world wide web may lead to the externalization of self worth and create a rapid cycling of euphoric highs and

dysthymic lows leaving the psychic structure vulnerable to imbalance and subsequent breakdown. The very idea of physical isolation coupled with virtual connectedness often helps in stimulating and improving higher mental abilities, while simultaneously leading to the unbridled widening of the gap between reality and fantasy without adequate opportunities for providing checks in between.

In such a situation, students must be taught to use the internet wisely, using personal discretion and responsibility.

- Adequate parental supervision is also advised, to ensure their **ward's security**.
- Definite and **separate time slots** should be allotted for different online activities.
- Students must be made to realize that other's opinions have a quality of transience and they rise and seize on their own accord. What persists instead, is their opinion of themselves shaped not by the following on their social media accounts but by their own **unique capabilities and talents**.
- Adequate opportunities for sharpening **social skills** should be provided in the post pandemic era.
- Students should be encouraged to seek social outlets through **nurturing hobbies and athletic abilities**.
- Appropriate **communication strategies and listening skills** should be inculcated.