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Relationships between problematic ICT use, anxiety, psychological, and behavioral aspects

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Background:

Anxiety is a substantial and developing health issue with significant consequences for psychosocial functioning and quality of life. The onset and severity of mental health problems have been linked to a number of biological, psychological, and behavioral factors.

Purpose:

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between the degree of anxiety, problematic information and communications technology (ICT) use, and certain related personal characteristics and adult health behavior. It also investigates the impact of personal characteristics in the moderating role of the association between problematic ICT use and anxiety.

Patients and Methods:

Descriptive, bivariate, multivariate, and moderation analyzes of data from 391 participants of 35-74 years old in primary healthcare centers located in Aragón, in northern Spain were performed between July 2021 and July 2022. The primary outcome was the severity of anxious symptoms as continuous variable (GAD-7).

Results:

Low self-esteem ($\beta = -0.120$; $p = 0.012$), low self-efficacy ($\beta = -0.092$; $p = 0.004$), and high problematic use of ICT ($\beta = 0.169$; $p = 0.001$), are predictors of having more severe anxious symptoms. Moderation analyzes were significant in the effect of self-efficacy ($b = -0.040$, $p = 0.001$) and resilience ($b = -0.024$, $p = 0.033$) on the relationship between problematic ICT use and anxiety.

Conclusions:

The problematic use of ICT and personal factors are related to anxious symptomatology. Adults with low resilience and self-efficacy have worse severity of anxiety associated with the problematic use of ICTs. These findings allow for a new approach to preventive identification and early care measures among people at risk and their families.

Key messages:

- Abuse of information and communication technologies happens at all ages and in a wide range of cultural situations, and it is a growing health issue.
- Knowing the psychological factors that lead to this harmful use of ICTs should be essential for early detection and intervention among those at risk and their families.