



INTERNET USES FOR ACCESSING HEALTH INFORMATION AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN UDUPI TALUK, KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

Background & objectives- Internet usage for searching health information has become common nowadays among college students because of the frequent use of digital technologies. Though several types of research done to access internet addiction among young adults but only a few focuses on searching for health information online among these group. This study was done to access the proportion of college students using the internet for searching health information and to access the pattern of internet use for health information. And find factors determining the search for health information online.

Methods- A cross-sectional study was conducted among the undergraduate students aged between 18-21 years. A self-reported questionnaire was administered to approximately 800 students enrolled in courses B.Com, B.A., BSc, BBM, LLB and BCA were used as data collection tool. Probability proportional to size sampling (PPS) technique was used for proportional distribution among the college & within each college; participants were selected by convenient sampling.

Results – The study shows that 67.2% (538/800) of the students had used the internet for accessing health information in the last 6-months. The majority of them searched for health topics related to fitness & exercise (61.7%), Diet & nutrition (36.57%). The reason for seeking health information online reported by the students was to keep confidentiality (49.4%) related to the health issue. Search for health information online also varies with age & courses.

Conclusion- More than half of the students searched for health information online, hence the quality & accuracy of health-related information on the internet need to be validated.

KEYWORDS : College students, health search, internet use.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has changed the way the people communicate, find and shares information throughout the world. The 21st century is an era of digitalization during this phase use of internet become very common and important for our day to day activities. The use of the internet for retrieving health information has been rapidly increased, as it provides access to various health related information and has the potential to affect one's health (Wilkins A. S., 1999). Information regarding health is easily available on the internet helps in better decision making about health medical care, in selecting health providers and communicate with others across the world via the internet. An approximate estimate that 4.5% of all internet search are related to health. However, search for health-related information online are associated with recent disease diagnosed and its treatment(Eysenbach G., (2000). Using the internet among college student is an important part of their routine life. Students used the internet for various purposes such as for educational, communication, emailing, social networking, etc. Studies have shown that use of the internet is high among young generation as compared to other age group and particularly among college students as they have access to the internet via mobile or personal computer(Loan, F. A., 2011). On literature review, it has been identified that young adult searches more health information online than any other age group, but little is known about the pattern and which type of health information they are looking on internet(Hanauer, D. A., Fortin, J., Dibble, E., & Col, N. F. 2003). Students find difficulties in accessing the traditional health services, so they find the internet as a confidential & convenient way to retrieve information(Horgan, A., & Sweeney, J., 2012). It also has been observed that young adults searching for health information on the internet can develop the practice of self-diagnosis and self-medication(Obasola, O. I., & Agunbiade, O. M., 2016). Though several types of research done to access internet addiction among young adults but only a few focuses on searching for health information online among these group. This study was done to access the proportion of college students using the internet for searching health information and to access the pattern of internet use for health information. And find factors determining the search for health information online.

MATERIAL AND METHODS-

The cross-sectional study was conducted among the thirteen undergraduate degree colleges of Udupi Taluk which is located in the urban & semi-urban area. Each college has the strength of students

ranging from 150-2500 depending on the course offered. The total strength of undergraduate college student was 5604 in Udupi Taluk. The study duration was between January and June 2016. The study participants were the undergraduate college students aged between 18-21 years enrolled in the courses B.COM, BBM, BA, BSC, BCA, and LLB. Since there was no previous published study related to internet utilization for health information in this region, so it was assumed that anticipate prevalence of 30% with relative precision 15% and design effect 2. Nonresponse rate 10%, so the final estimated sample size was 800. Samples were selected by probability proportional to size sampling (PPS) technique was used for proportional distribution among colleges and within each college, respondent was selected by convenient sampling. A participant who are using the internet & belongs to age group 18-21 years were included in the study, while those students who are above 21 years and below 18 years and not using the internet were excluded from the study. A self-administered validated questionnaire was used in the study for the purpose data collection. The questionnaire was administered in the English language. The data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0. The proportion of UG students using the internet for health information was reported in percentages. The pattern of internet utilization for accessing health information online was reported in frequency and percentage. Chi-square and logistic regression test were used for factors determining the search for health information online.

RESULTS

The present study includes 800 participants enrolled in courses B.com (49.6%), BBM (10.2%), LLB (8.1%), BSc (18.2%), BCA (1.0%) and BA (10.8%). The majority of the respondent were from the third year (52.6%) followed by second (24.6%) & first year (21.5%). The mean age of the participants with the standard deviation was 19±0.929. The majority of the female respondent (65.0%) as compared to male (35.0%) participated in the study. All students reported the use of internet in the past 6-months (100%). The majority of the participants gained computer knowledge by self-learning (74.1%) while few participants reported the use of another source of learning (3.5%) but they have not mentioned the name of a source.

Regarding the device used for surfing the internet, the majority of the participant had use Smartphone (55.2%) while few participants reported the use PC/laptops (24.0%).

I. Table Showing Distribution Of Participants According To Internet Usage (n=800)

Hours of internet use	n (%)
<1hrs/day	313 (39.1)
1-2hrs/day	250 (31.2)
2-3hrs/day	93 (11.6)
>3hrs/day	141 (17.6)
internet surfing per week	
Daily	443 (55.4)
Alternate day	119 (14.9)
Twice a week	78 (9.8)
Once a week	160 (20.0)
Perceived level of experience with the internet surfing	
Very experienced	139 (17.4)
Somewhat experienced	597 (74.6)
Not experience	61 (7.6)
Reason for using the internet*	
Social networking	Yes 554 (69.2)
	No 239 (29.9)
Academic info.	Yes 414 (51.8)
	No 379 (47.4)
Entertainment	Yes 370 (46.2)
	No 423 (52.9)

*multiple Responses

II. Table Showing Distribution Of Participants According To Internet Usage For Health Information (n=799)

The Internet uses for accessing health information in the past 6-months	n	%
Yes	538	67.2%
No	261	32.6%

A respondent who accesses health information on the internet, the majority of them search for health information on search engine 43.0% for example Google, Yahoo, UC browser. About 90.7% of the participants reported that they "some time" used the health information online while only a few reported that they "always" (8.2%) use the internet for searching health information. Most of the participants searched health information for themselves (67.1%). About 68.5% of the participants sought the second opinion on the information they retrieved from the internet. The majority of the participant's shares health information obtained from the internet with their family (44.4%) followed by friends (36.1%). Only a few participants reported that they share information with their doctor (17.5%). The reason for searching health information online was to keep confidentiality (49.4%) related to health issue among the participants. Among the age group, the odds of searching health information online among age 20 years was 74% more with the **OR= 1.74** (1.15, 2.63, **p value-0.008**) as compared to 18-year ages. Among courses, the odds of searching health information online among BA course was 66% less with **OR= .343** (.21, .552, **p value-<0.001**) as compared to B.Com course under the study.

III. Table Showing Distribution Of Participants According To The Purpose For Seeking Health Information Online (n=535) {*multiple Ans.}

Purpose for seeking health information online	n (%)
Surfed for disease/ medicine specific information	108(20.2%)
General information for healthy lifestyle	425(79.4%)
Clarify /cross check doctor's prescription	62 (11.6%)
Information on hospital/health services	87(16.3%)

IV. Table Showing Distribution Of Participants According To Which Health Topic Searching On Internet (n=534) {*multiple Ans.}

Health related topics participant searching on the internet	n (%)
Fitness or exercise	330 (61.7%)
Diet and nutrition	196(36.57%)
Medication	76 (14.2%)

Alcohol /smoking	21(3.9%)
Sexual health	32(6.0%)
Mental health	61(11.4%)
Skin and beauty	240 (44.9%)
Hospital /health services	107(20.0%)

DISCUSSION

The study findings show that 67.2% college students aged between 18-21 years had used the internet for accessing health information in the last 6-months. Participants searched health information on a search engine (43.0%) more as compared to other health website and application. The majority of the students reported that they are searching for information related to fitness & exercise (61.7%) on the internet while only a few respondents disclosed the search for information related to sexual (6.0%) & mental health (11.4%). Female participants searched more for information related to skin & beauty. A study done by Gray N. et al, shows that only a few students disclosed about their health-related search on the internet.

The limitation of the study was recall bias was encountered as students asked about the use of the internet for accessing health information on the internet in the past 6-months & within each college; students were selectively given by authority.

The aim of this study was to generate evidence showing the use of the internet for health information among students which can lead to the practice of self-diagnosis & medication among non- medical students. Students should be guided to consult a doctor for any health related issue instead of searching that information on the internet. Information on the internet related to health should be used with cautiously and the quality & accuracy of information related to health available on the internet need to be validated.

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