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Role of Cyberchondriasis in Predicting Psychological Well-Being among Women

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Abstract

Background: The lives of the individuals have gradually been impacted by the internet which has developed into an essential source of communication with the outside world. The advent of the internet as a primary source of health-related information has revolutionized how individuals approach their health concerns. It has given rise to an abnormal behavioral phenomenon referred to as cyberchondriasis characterized by excessive and compulsive online health information seeking behavior that leads to elevated anxiety and psychological distress. **Aim:**The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between cyberchondriasis and psychological well-being among women. **Participants:**The present study was conducted on 204 women with the age range of 21-30 years. The participants were drawn using the convenient sampling method. The measures of cyberchondriasis severity scale and Ryff's psychological well-being scale were administered on study participants to assess the variables under study. The descriptive analysis, correlation and regression analysis were applied to analyze the data. **Results:**The findings revealed that there was a significant negative correlation between cyberchondriasis and psychological well-being among women *(r=-.41, p<.01)*. The regression analysis revealed that cyberchondriasis contributed 17 per cent of the variance in predicting psychological well-being among women. The limitations, suggestions and implications were also discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

The internet has become a fundamental part of everyone's day-to-day life because its usage has been increasing globally (Bhardwaj & Rani, 2018). It serves as the first interactive digital medium for a wide range of uses and operations of mass media. When it comes to information sources, the internet has displaced newspapers, libraries and television since the early 1990s (Boz & Aksoy, 2011). People utilize the internet nowadays to purchase online, get innovative ideas, recipes for cooking, and much more. The extensive network gives the opportunity to avail numerous benefits and features for social, professional and personal awareness (Gupta et al., 2018). It has always been considered that internet is an agreeably expedient, revealing, resourceful and potentially capable to generate economic and social advantages. Because of internet's easy availability and widespread usage, the lives of people both personal and professional, has been altered profoundly (Boz & Aksoy, 2011).

The internet continues to grow prominently as a reservoir of information and details on numerous themes including health (Bagaric & Jokic-Begic, 2019). Several individuals utilize online resources to acquire information regarding their illnesses, communicate with others who have the same condition, research medications, medical professionals and alternative remedies (Kahn & Dennis, 2023). Through the use of online resources, patients can learn more about their treatment options, increase the amount of information they get from medical professionals, eliminate a number of unimportant visits to healthcare experts, and swiftly and secretly locate the information they need. However, it is assumed that information provided by the internet about health is beneficial but various health experts notify regarding the likelihood of risk factors (Bagaric & Jokic-Begic, 2019). The internet has emerged as a vital worldwide resource for health information, with communication taking place on massive digital social networking systems that has the capacity to share data at a very high transmission rate, scope and access. The encounter of earlier and recent health crises implies that frequent exposure to communal problems in the media might raise stress levels and anxiety which can have an adverse impact on one's health (Jokic-Begic et al. 2020).

Cyberchondriasis

It seems that cyberchondriasis or excessive health anxiety, based on the internet health searches, is the forthcoming major trend in illness anxiety (Harding et al., 2008; Starcevic & Berle, 2013). Insecurity and anxiety can lead to a compulsive search for information on the internet which exacerbates anxiety and sets off a difficult-to-break cycle of cyberchondriasis (Jokic-Begic et al. 2020). Cyberchondriasis is the term used for excessive or recurrent search on the internet for information related to health, triggered by health-related anxiety or distress and serve to exacerbate aforesaid distress or anxiety (Starcevic & Berle, 2013). While most individuals find that using internet resources to obtain health related information is a practical, easily available and not an uncommon method, there are some other situations in which extreme and continuous searching on the digital platforms can develop into a pathological behavior known as cyberchondriasis (Maftei & Holman, 2020).

The majority of individuals now turn to the internet as their primary source when seeking information regarding symptoms, health and ailment (Starcevic, 2017). The internet research can promote one's own health and well-being, early diagnosis of major conditions, along with a more comprehensive understanding of managing illnesses. Additionally, it has the potential to increase health awareness and encourage preventive health practices (Sezer et al., 2022).

All the people having cyberchondriasis seem to have one thing in common and that is they spend a lot of time to do the searches. This is typically done at the cost of engaging in other activities, which may have adverse effects further (Starcevic, 2017). With the popularity of digitalization and metaverse, it can be expected that cyberchondriasis may rise, shift in structure and have major negative effects on mental well-being in the forthcoming years (Sezer et al., 2022). It can affect a person's capacity to work, maintain relationships and access medical and mental health services and cyberchondriasis may pose a serious public health risk in itself (Mathes et al., 2018).

Theoretical Models of Cyberchondriasis

Reassurance-Seeking Model: An extensive and anxiety-inducing internet surfing for information related to health, triggered by discomfort or concern about one's health and following need for reassurance, might be one description of this type of behavior (Starcevic&Berle, 2013). This concept contends that people with high level of health anxiety performs online health research to feel reassured about their health problems (Starcevic et al. 2020). One way to describe cyberchondriasis is that it is an expression of reassurance seeking on the part of those who are overly anxious and obsessed with their health (Starcevic & Berle, 2013; Starcevic et al., 2020). People who considerably require a great deal of information to feel reassured could be more likely to develop cyberchondriasis since they might never stop searching for it.It is possible that a lot of people are not aware about the ambiguity of the internet and have erroneous expectations. As a result, many people may experience frustration, disappointment, overwhelmed and heightened distress or fear when their online probing is unable to offer them the guidance and reassurance they require (Starcevic et al., 2020).

Meta-cognitive Beliefs Model: Nadeem et al. (2022) mentioned thatthere are a set of methods, information and strategies that govern an

individual's cognitive processes and these are referred as metacognitions. According to Fergus and Spada (2018), metacognitive beliefs are classified into two categories – positive metacognitive beliefs and negative metacognitive beliefs. Positive metacognitive beliefs represent views about the advantages of thinking under control and in contrast to that negative metacognitive beliefs represent views about the risks or inability to control thinking.In addition to that there are three sets of metacognitive beliefs that are significant for the thoughts related to health – biased thinking, thought illness fusion and beliefs about the inability to control thoughts (Fergus & Spada, 2018; Vismara et al., 2020). Research has indicated that metacognitive beliefs, particularly those pertaining to biased thinking and uncontrolled health-related thoughts, cause people to worry about their health and look up medical information online in an attempt to lessen the concern (SeyedHashemi et al., 2020).

Psychological Well-being

The description of life as satisfying with a high intensity of positive affect and a low intensity of negative affect is known as psychological well-being (Sezer et al., 2022). It is a state in which an individual is developing and realising their potential as well as leading a fulfilling and satisfying life. According to Ryff, psychological well-being has an implication on both physical and psychological health in addition to psychological flourishing and self-realization. Through the ideal regulation of numerous physiological and neurological systems, there is evidence that it protects against variety of diseases and disabilities (Matud et al., 2019). Psychological well-being highlights high degrees of flexibility, optimism and strong social relationships while emphasizing the person's optimal functioning. It emphasizes positive functions as opposed to distress, dysfunction and depression. People who are highly functioning look for direction and significance in their life and build strong bonds with others (Yigit & Cakmak, 2024).

The psychological well-being generally incorporates the following dimensions: autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, purpose in life and personal growth (Morales-Rodriguez et al., 2020). The extent of liberty and the potential to independently make decisions are associated with the extent of autonomy a person possesses. Environmental mastery entails taking command of one's environment, handling challenges and managing daily responsibilities. Personal growth is a sign of someone's dedication to constant development and progress. The dimension positive relations with others is primarily concerned with an individual's ability to form and maintain positive relationships with other people. Purpose in life refers to reaching specific objectives and experiencing a sense of purpose might help one discover the meaning of life. Thepositive aspects of a person's image of self, greater self-esteem and a heightened sense of self-worth are the features of self-acceptance (Moghe & Misra, 2024).

The existing literature indicated that cyberchondriasis was negatively associated with well-being and directly proportional to depression (Liu et al. 2023). Dameery et al. (2020) aimed to investigate the relationship between cyberchondriasis and psychological distress and came up with the findings of a positive association between the variables. The results of a study displayed that problematic usage of the internet has a negative correlation with self-esteem and a positive correlation with psychological distress and loneliness (Mamun et al., 2020). Budrionis et al. (2020) have found out that after the usage of e-health services, most of the users expressed the feeling of better informed and assured.It has been displayed in a study by Park (2025) that engagement in online health seeking behaviour leads to low levels of stress, anxiety and depression as it provides a sense of empowerment, control and self-efficacy. The findings were also seen in a research article which stated that searching disease related information on the internet is associated with increase in psychological well-being and the same study also mentioned that levels of anxiety exacerbate the internet surfing of health-related information (Sezer et al., 2022).

The easy availability and accessibility of internet-derived information related to health has changed the perception, interpretation and responses to the health concerns. An easy path of information acquisition can empower patients and promote health awareness but it has led to the emergence of maladaptive information-seeking patterns which elevates anxiety rather than reassurance, referred to as cyberchondriasis. Women are supposed to actively manage their own health and other family members as well. Women may be more susceptible to cyberchondriasis and its psychological effects since they are frequently described as being more proactive in health-

seeking behaviours including constant use of internet resources for medical information (Jia et al., 2021). So, it could be assumed that they engage in the online health-seeking behaviour more often and could become susceptible to the detrimental effects of cyberchondriasis, including a decline in their psychological well-being. The prior existing body of literature highlighted the connection of cyberchondriasis, problematic usage of the internet, e-health services with well-being, depression, psychological distress, self-esteem, loneliness, and reassurance. The psychological well-being, which includes autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others and purpose in life, may get threatened because of the ongoing health-related anxiety which is elevated due to the information acquired from the internet. In the context of women, particularly in socio-cultural settings where women frequently bear double responsibilities for their personal health and the health of their family members, the association between cyberchondriasis and psychological well-being has not received requisite attention.The prevalence of cyberchondriasis has been the subject of an increasing amount of literature; nevertheless, the majority of this information has been undertaken in general populations and in Western countries, with little attention paid to gender-specific experiences.The study on this junction is still limited. Considering this knowledge gap, it is essential to identify the harmful effects of cyberchondriasis on psychological well-being of women and create digital literacy initiatives and gender-sensitive treatments that can reduce the negative psychological effects of cyberchondriasis.

In order to address this gap in the knowledge, the major aim of the current study was to measure the relationship of cyberchondriasis with psychological well-beingamong women. The investigation further includes the assessment of the contribution of cyberchondriasis in predicting the dimensions of psychological well-being (i.e., self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, and purpose in life) and overall psychological well-being among women. Based on the outcomes of the previous literature, it was hypothesized that there would be an existence of association between cyberchondriasis and psychological well-being among women.

Method

Participants

The study was encompassed on a sample of 204 women participants drawn from the general population of Central University of Haryana, Mahendergarh. The participants included in the study fall under the age range of 21 to 30 years (Mean = 23.15, SD = 2.32). Those participants were involved who can adequately understand the English language and the following demographic propertiesof the sample were incorporated: age, birth order, family type, marital status, locality and education. A convenient sampling approach was employed to obtain the requisite data for the study.

Table 1 : Demographic features of the articipants

Demographic characteristics		*n*	*%*
Females		204	100
Age			
	21-25	171	83.8
	26-30	33	16.2
Birth Order			
	First born	89	43.6
	Middle born	74	36.3
	Last born	39	19.1
	Only child	2	1.0
Family Type			
	Nuclear	136	66.7
	Joint	68	33.3
Marital status			
	Unmarried	178	87.3
	Married	26	12.7
Locality			
	Urban	106	52.0
	Rural	98	48.0
Education			
	UG	89	43.6
	PG	115	56.4

Design of the Study

A correlational research design was used to investigate the association of cyberchondriasis with psychological well-being and its dimensions, i.e., autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, and purpose in life. Linear regression analysis was applied further to understand the contribution of cyberchondriasis in predicting psychological well-being among women participants.

Priori Analysis

G*Power software, version 3.1.9.7, was used to ascertain the required sample size for the study by performing a power analysis of a priori bivariate correlational model. A medium effect size (ρ = .03) was entered in the softwareto obtain the required sample size for one-tailed and two-tailed tests. The analysis reported that a sample size of 115 participants would be necessary for a one-tailed correlation analysis and a sample size of 138 participants for a two-tailed correlation analysis.

Table 2 Requisite sample size for the study

Effect size	Required sample for one-tailed	Required sample for two-tailed
Medium (ρ = .03)	115	138

Measures

The following tools have been utilized in order to obtain the data from the selected participants. The description of each tool is as follows:

I. **Cyberchondria Severity Scale by McElroy and Shevlin (2014):**This scale was designed to measure the distress (McElroy &Shevlin, 2014) caused by searching on the internet for health information. It is a 33-item scale with 5-point Likert-type response format (1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, and 5=Always). The scale possesses the Cronbach's alpha value of .94 (Nadeem et al., 2022). Some examples of the itemsare: (a) If I notice an unexplained bodily sensation I will search for it on the internet. (b) I have trouble relaxing after researching symptoms or perceived medical conditions online. (c) I feel more anxious or distressed after researching symptoms or perceived medical conditions online. (d) I have trouble getting to sleep after researching symptom or perceived medical conditions online, as the findings play on my mind.

II. **Psychological Well-Being Scale by Ryffand Keyes (1995):** This scale is used to measure the six aspects of happiness and well-being (Mazumdar et al., 2021). The six aspects include autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and positive relations with others. It consists of 18 items with 7-point Likert scale response format (8 items using response code as strongly agree-1, somewhat agree-2, a little agree-3, neither agree nor disagree-4, a little disagree-5, somewhat disagree-6, and strongly disagree-7; and 10 items using the reverse code as strongly agree-7, somewhat agree-6, a little agree-5, neither agree nor disagree-4, a little disagree-3, somewhat disagree-2, and strongly disagree-1)(Rehman et al., 2016). The scale indicated a good internal consistency with the value of Cronbach's alpha as .81 (Mazumdar et al., 2021). Some of the items of this scale are as follows: a) I like most parts of my personality. b) Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me. c) I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago. d) I have confidence in my own opinions, even if they are different from the way most other people think.

Procedure

The source of the data was the women participants between the ages of 21 and 30 years, studying at the university in various programs. Depending on availability, participants were addressed in their specified classrooms, laboratories, and common sitting areas. Prior authorization from the in-charge staff of that particular class or lab was taken in order to gather data from the samples seated.Initially, the participants were made comfortable and goodcommunication was established with them. Explicit instructions were delivered to all the participants before proceeding to give responses for the measures and the queries participants had beenalso appropriately addressed. Written informed consent was obtained from the participants and sufficient time was given to respond to each and every statement of all the measures. In this manner, the specified measures were administered on the available sample.

RESULTS

This research study aimed to examine the association of cyberchondriasis with psychological well-being and its dimensions (autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, and purpose in life) among women. Further, it holds to investigate the shared variance of cyberchondriasis with psychological well-being and its dimensions, where cyberchondriasis was considered as a predictor variable and psychological well-being with its dimensions was considered as a criterion variable. For the analysis of association between the variables, Pearson product-moment correlationwas utilized and the results are represented in table 3.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix for cyberchondriasis, psychological well-being and its various dimensions

Variables	*n*	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.CYB	204	84.16	18.82	-							
2.SA	204	16.25	2.96	-.26**	-						
3.AU	204	14.47	3.03	-.20**	.28**	-					
4.EM	204	14.38	3.20	-.18**	.41**	.16*	-				
5.PG	204	16.90	3.14	-.29**	.32**	.36**	.26**	-			
6.PR	204	13.25	3.85	-.29**	.24**	.12	.18**	.11	-		
7.PL	204	13.26	3.48	-.19**	.03	.85	.02	.37**	.06	-	
8.PWB	204	88.54	11.33	-.41**	.63**	.55**	.58**	.68**	.54**	.47**	-

CYB=Cyberchondriasis, SA=Self-Acceptance, AU=Autonomy, EM=Environmental Mastery, PG=Personal Growth, PR=Positive Relations with Others, and PWB=Psychological Well-Being.$^{*}p$<.05.$^{**}p$<.01.

It has been demonstrated in Table 3 that cyberchondriasis has a significant relationship with all the dimensions of psychological well-being and the overall psychological well-being itself. The relationship of cyberchondriasis with self-acceptance was revealed to be negatively significant *(r = -.26, p<.01)*. This finding implied that the increasing tendency of cyberchondriasis may lead to low self-acceptance. The relationship of cyberchondriasis with autonomy was found to be negatively significant *(r = -.20, p<.01)*. This suggested that the escalated features of cyberchondriasis may accompany diminished autonomy. The relationship of cyberchondriasis with environmental mastery was revealed to be negatively significant *(r = -.18, p<.01)*. This indicated that cyberchondriasis may lead to a decrease in environmental mastery. The relationship between cyberchondriasis and personal growth was found to be negatively significant (*r = -.29, p<.01)*.Their correlation exhibited that cyberchondriasis may generate faulty personal growth. The relationship between cyberchondriasis and positive relations with otherswas found to be negatively significant (*r = -.29, p<.01)*. This displayed that the behavioral tendency of cyberchondriasis may lead to a lack in positive relations with others. The association of cyberchondriasis with purpose in life was also found to be negatively significant (*r = -.19, p<.01)*.The features of cyberchondriasis displayed an inverse relationship with purpose in life. There is a significant negative correlation found between cyberchondriasis and overall psychological well-being(*r = -.41, p<.01*). This indicated that cyberchondriasis may lead to poor psychological well-being.

Table 4 Simple linear regression for the predictor variable cyberchondriasis and the criterion variable psychological well-being and its dimensions

Models	**B**	**SE B**	**β**	**t**	**p-value**	**R^2**
			Cyberchondriasis			
Self-Acceptance	-.041	.011	-.260	-3.834	.000	.068
Autonomy	-.033	.011	-.202	-2.933	.004	.041
Environmental Mastery	-.032	.012	-.187	-2.704	.007	.035
Personal Growth	-.048	.011	-.290	-4.311	.000	.084
Positive relations with others	-.061	.014	-.297	-4.425	.000	.088
Purpose in Life	-.036	.013	-.196	-2.844	.005	.039
Psychological well-being (total)	-.251	.039	-.417	-6.514	.000	.174

p<.01, β=Standardized Beta

The analysis of simple linear regression was applied for the purpose of predicting psychological well-being through cyberchondriasis. According to Table 4, the R^2 value of .068 indicated that cyberchondriasis shared 6.8 per cent of the variance in explainingself-acceptance. The results of the study revealed that the self-acceptance dimension of psychological well-being was significantly and negatively predicted by cyberchondriasis ($\beta = -.260, p<.01$). The R^2 value of .041 displayed that cyberchondriasis shared 4.1 per cent of the variance in predicting autonomy. The results suggested that cyberchondriasis significantly and negatively predicted the other dimension of psychological well-being measure which is autonomy ($\beta = -.202, p<.01$). The R^2 value of .035 indicated that cyberchondriasis shared 3.5 per cent of the variance in explaining environmental mastery. The results of the study revealed that the environmental mastery dimension of psychological well-being was significantly and negatively predicted by cyberchondriasis ($\beta = -.187, p<.01$). The R^2 value of .084 indicated that cyberchondriasis shared 8.4 per cent of the variance in predicting personal growth. The results of the study revealed that the personal growth dimension of psychological well-being was significantly and negatively predicted by cyberchondriasis ($\beta = -.290, p<.01$). The R^2 value of .088 displayed that cyberchondriasis shared 8.8 per cent of the variance in explaining positive relations with others. The results suggested that cyberchondriasis significantly and negatively predicted the other dimension of psychological well-being measure, which is positive relations with others ($\beta = -.297, p<.01$). The R^2 value of .039 reflected that cyberchondriasis shared 3.9 per cent of the variance in explaining purpose in life. The results demonstrated that cyberchondriasis significantly and negatively predicted the purpose in life dimension of the psychological well-being measure ($\beta = -.196, p<.01$). The R^2 value of .174 represented that cyberchondriasis contributed 17.4 per cent of the variance in explaining overall psychological well-being. The results highlighted that cyberchondriasis significantly and negatively predicted overall psychological well-being ($\beta = .417, p<.01$).

Discussion

The obtained findings are discussed by considering the prior literature that exists in academia, which confirms and contradicts the present findings, and the authors' observations are also put forward wherever required to sustain the objective and hypothesis. The results highlighted that there was a significantly negative relationship between cyberchondriasis and self-acceptance scores of women participants. It was further obtained that cyberchondriasis negatively and significantly predicted self-acceptance among women. The women participants, who engage in online health-seeking behavior, find it difficult to trust their body symptoms and feel doubtful about their physical health. The constant monitoring of the body and therelated anxiety undermine their acceptance of themselves by making it harder for them to acknowledge their physical and psychological changes. The tendency to engage in online health-related searches,which leads to increased self-doubt and concern about one's health and a critical mindset about one's appearance, is detrimental to self-acceptance. The gender role assigned to women and the expectations attached to it can reinforce the self-scrutiny through online information searching, which may increase self-criticism and bring down the acceptance.

The findings evidenced that there was a negative association of cyberchondriasis with autonomy and the regression analysis also highlighted that cyberchondriasis significantly and negatively contributed in predicting the autonomy dimension in women participants. Instead of trusting their own judgments, participants with cyberchondriac tendencies frequently turn to outside internet sources for comfort which compromises their autonomy.The repeated searching on the internet to acquire health information can lead to confusion and doubt among individuals questioning their own decisions and becoming more reliant on outside approval which could be a threat to their autonomy. The dependence on validation that comes from internet searching may lead to uncertainty and information overload, which eventually reduces a woman's ability to make firm decisions. Their searching on the internet related to health concerns makes them dependent on external sources for reassurance on the choices for health. A study conducted by Lee and Lin (2016) gave contradictory results by stating that while looking for information related to health on the internet, people experienced more autonomy, relatedness and competence than when they visit a doctor in person.

The outcomes revealed that there was a negative association between cyberchondriasis and environmental mastery and the further analysis of linear regression exhibited that cyberchondriasis significantly and negatively contributed in predicting environmental mastery among women participants. Casale et al. (2015) mentioned in their study that environmental mastery was inversely proportional to generalized problematic internet usage, which could be assumed to be in line with the findings of the current study. The women may experience less capability of structuring their surroundings, organizing daily tasks or responding to life's demands when their attention and energy are diverted by uncertainties related to health. The continuous attention to health issues may deplete mental and emotional capacity, reducing one's ability to make wise decisions and solve problems in everyday life.

It has been observed that cyberchondriasis possesses a negative association with the personal growth dimension of psychological well-being and the conduction of linear regression demonstrated that cyberchondriasis contributed significantly and negatively in predicting personal growth among the women participants. It implied that women who engage in excessive online searches for information related to health typically have a reduced tendency to acquire new experiences, sense of development and the potential realization of their capabilities. The preoccupation with the internet for healthcare detailing may become an obstacle to growth-oriented activities. Such people get fixated on perceived health risks rather than on learning new skills and self-expansion.

The results of the study displayed that cyberchondriasis has a negative association with the dimension of positive relations with others. The findings further revealed that cyberchondriasis significantly and negatively contributed in sharing the variance with positive relations with others. These outcomes depicted that women engaged in online health information-seeking behavior face complexity in the maintenance of warm and satisfying interactions with people around them. The consistent concern for health and the compulsion to search on the internet for health issues can make them more self-focused and withdrawn from social interactions, which further diminishes their ability to be emotionally available in relationships.It could be possible that the continuous discussions about health issues and recurrent seeking of reassurance from the people around may create tension in the social connection.

The findings stated that cyberchondriasis has a negative association with purpose in life and it also significantly and negatively shared the variance with the said dimension.These outcomes suggested that women who get involved in excessive and compulsive online probing related to health information may have a lack of sense of meaning, direction and life goals. Cyberchondriasis may take away attention from the long-term objectives to immediate survival concerns related to health. The repetitive reassurance seeking for health discomfort may provide constricted mental space to chase a meaningful purpose. The emphasis on stress regarding health shatters the ability to determine a purpose or goal. Cyberchondriasis among women may erode their purpose in life by highlighting the short-term anxiety, instead of the long-term objectives of life.

The results revealed that there was a negative association between cyberchondriasis and psychological well-being among women. The further analysis of linear regression exhibited that cyberchondriasis significantly and negatively shared the variance in predicting psychological well-being.A study conducted by Sezer et al. (2022) has given contradictory results by mentioning that using the internet for acquiring health related information leads to reduction in psychological stress and eventually leading to better psychological well-being among those females who were in their reproductive age. The results obtained by Liu et al. (2023) supported the current findings by indicating that cyberchondriasis headed to psychological insecurity which created a negative association of it with well-being and a positive association with depression. Due to frequent exposure to internet derived confusing or alarming information, women feel more anxious, uncertain and fearful about the health concerns. The ongoing excessiveness and compulsion to seek reassurance for the possible disease may cause disturbances in their psychological health and it may also lead to a decline in the confidence in one's ability to handle health related problems of self and that of others in the house or the closed ones. The recurrent checking on the internet for information related to health impairs the clarity, creates helplessness and increases reliance on the information available on the internet. This damages the psychological well-being, which incorporates autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental

mastery, positive relations with others, personal growth and purpose in life. This cycle of frequent information acquisition from the internet may worsen the anxiety and impose a decreased sense of fulfilment which would ultimately undermine the psychological well-being among those women who have to embody multiple roles and responsibilities.

Implications and Suggestions

The outcomes of the study would broaden the knowledge regarding cyberchondriasis by emphasizing its detrimental correlation with several aspects of women's psychological well-being especially in the situations when gender norms and social expectations intensify self-reflection. The counselors and therapists should evaluate the tendencies of cyberchondriasis when treating the anxiety, low self-acceptance, diminished autonomy, lack of decision making, and constricted objectives of life among women because these tendencies may be the covert causes of psychological disturbances. In order to decrease misinformation and reassurance seeking behavior, medical professionals and healthcare providers should be aware of how cyberchondriasis contributes to anxiety and stress and should offer patients the reliable sources of information. Workshops or seminars for health literacy can be created to assist women in reviewing online health information critically and making positive use of digital platforms without developing an excessive and compulsive searching behavior. Time limit should be maintained for the time spent on internet for obtaining health related information by practicing mindful internet usage. The alternative strategies for coping from this tendency could be used like relaxation techniques, physical activities or journaling etc. to manage the stressful situation.

Limitations

The results of the study cannot be generalized on the male population. Since the data was collected mostly from the student sample, it may not completely be a representative of a wide range of the women population. The self-report measures were administered on the sample which may originated underreporting of health-related information searching behavior. The health conditions, cultural factors, and the socioeconomic status were not taken into account to see the impact of cyberchondriasis on psychological well-being.

Conclusion

The overall findings of the negative correlation between cyberchondriasis and psychological well-being suggested that rather than offering comfort, assurance and empowerment, cyberchondriasis reduces the mental strength among women and makes them more susceptible to worry which results in poor psychological health outcomes.The present findings have also represented that cyberchondriasis exhibited a negative association with the dimensions of psychological well-being i.e., autonomy, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others and purpose in life. The propensity to excessively indulge in online health information seeking behavior also promotes self-doubt, dependency on internet derived information for validation and an obsession with the concerns related to health. This eventually deteriorate women's psychological well-being by reducing their capacity to make decisions with confidence, diminishes their handling of everyday tasks, affects their social relationships and narrow down their long-term goals. The current study emphasizes the negative effects of excessive and compulsive searching on the internet to obtain health information, supporting the idea that cyberchondriasis is a hinderance to self-acceptance, development and fulfilment, despite some earlier researches suggesting that internet derived health information might promote autonomy, empowerment and lower stress. In a nutshell, it could be concluded that even if internet is considered as a useful tool for healthcare suggestions, repeated use of it can increase anxiety and negatively affect psychological well-being of women as they have to play many roles in her surroundings according to the demands and responsibilities assigned by the society.

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Ethics Statement

The study was approved by the department of Psychology, Central University of Haryana and all aspects of the research were completed without harming to participants or using any invasive techniques. Additionally, all ethical guidelines issued by the American Psychological Association (APA) have been followed diligently throughout the entire process, from data collection to writing the manuscript.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed Consent was taken from all the participants.

Data Availability Statement

Date related to this manuscript will be made available as per genuine request as per institutional policy of Central University of Haryana.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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