

# ADDICTION OF WATCHING KOREAN DRAMA SERIES, LONELINESS, FRUSTRATION AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

*Original Research*

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Excessive television consumption, particularly addiction to Korean drama series, has emerged as a behavioral concern, potentially affecting mental well-being. University students, as a highly engaged audience, often develop compulsive viewing habits that may contribute to emotional distress, including loneliness and frustration. Prolonged engagement with digital entertainment is linked to maladaptive coping mechanisms, further exacerbating mental health issues. Understanding the psychological impact of Korean drama addiction is essential for promoting healthier media consumption behaviors.

**Objective:** This study aimed to examine the relationship between addiction to watching Korean drama series, loneliness, frustration, and mental health problems in university students. Additionally, the serial mediation effect of loneliness and frustration in this relationship was investigated.

**Methods:** A correlational research design was employed with a sample of 310 university students (157 men, 153 women) recruited from both public and private institutions. The mean age of participants was 21.63 years ( $SD = 1.55$ ). Standardized psychometric tools, including the Television Addiction for Korean TV Series Scale, UCLA Loneliness Scale, Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale, and Mental Health Inventory, were used for data collection. Pearson product-moment correlation, serial mediation analysis using AMOS, and independent sample t-tests were applied for statistical analysis.

**Results:** Addiction to Korean drama series showed a significant positive correlation with loneliness ( $r = 0.548, p < 0.01$ ), frustration ( $r = 0.426, p < 0.05$ ), and mental health problems ( $r = 0.479, p < 0.01$ ). Women exhibited higher addiction scores ( $M = 153, SD = 13.99$ ) than men ( $M = 125.16, SD = 14.52$ ). Frustration significantly predicted mental health problems ( $\beta = 0.23, p < 0.001$ ). Loneliness partially mediated the relationship between addiction and frustration ( $\beta = 0.06, p = 0.45$ ), but no serial mediation effect of loneliness and frustration was found between addiction and mental health outcomes.

**Conclusion:** The findings suggest that addiction to watching Korean dramas is strongly associated with psychological distress among university students. While loneliness mediated the relationship between addiction and frustration, its impact on mental health problems was not statistically confirmed. Understanding these behavioral patterns is crucial for developing interventions that promote balanced media consumption and psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** Addiction, anxiety, depression, frustration, loneliness, mental health, university students.

## INTRODUCTION

The increasing popularity of Korean drama series has led to a significant shift in entertainment consumption patterns, particularly among university students. The immersive nature of these dramas, characterized by compelling storytelling, high production quality, and emotional engagement, has contributed to excessive viewing behaviors that may lead to addiction. While these dramas offer an escape from reality and provide a source of relaxation, excessive and compulsive consumption has raised concerns regarding its psychological and social consequences. The phenomenon of binge-watching has been linked to behavioral and emotional changes, including loneliness, frustration, and mental health disturbances(1-3). Television addiction, as a recognized behavioral concern, has been extensively studied, with findings indicating that excessive television consumption can lead to cognitive, emotional, and social impairments. The structured narratives and visually appealing aesthetics of Korean dramas make them particularly addictive, leading individuals to spend excessive hours watching, often at the cost of essential daily activities such as academic responsibilities, social interactions, and physical well-being. In particular, university students, who experience significant academic pressures and social transitions, are at risk of developing an attachment to such entertainment as a coping mechanism. Research suggests that addiction to watching television series, especially those with strong emotional narratives, can lead to escapism and withdrawal from real-life interactions, fostering a sense of isolation and loneliness(4, 5).

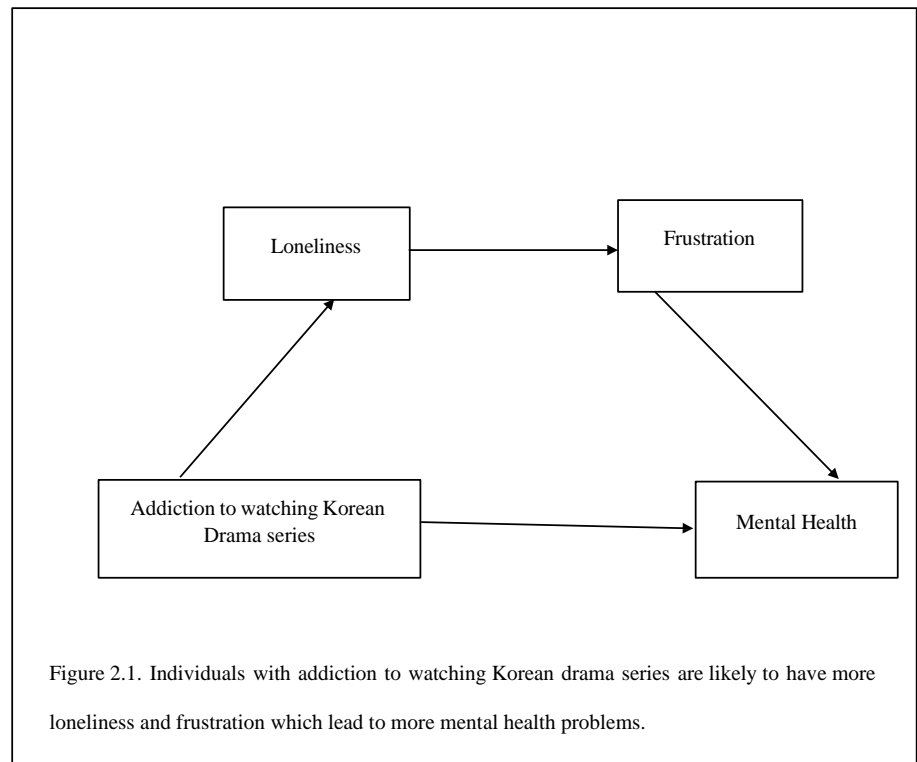
Loneliness, as a psychological state, has been strongly associated with problematic media consumption. Individuals who experience social isolation may resort to excessive media engagement as a substitute for real social connections. This reliance on screen-based relationships may deepen the sense of detachment from reality, leading to increased frustration and emotional distress. Frustration, in this context, arises as a consequence of unfulfilled expectations, social disconnection, and the inability to regulate screen time effectively. Studies have indicated that frustration stemming from excessive engagement in screen-based entertainment may contribute to emotional instability, reduced impulse control, and increased vulnerability to mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression(6, 7). The impact of excessive Korean drama consumption on mental health has been a growing concern. Several studies have linked compulsive viewing behaviors to heightened levels of psychological distress, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances. The gratification obtained from watching these dramas often results in a dependency that interferes with daily functioning. Furthermore, the idealized portrayals of relationships, beauty standards, and social dynamics in Korean dramas can contribute to unrealistic expectations and negative self-perception, further exacerbating emotional distress among young viewers(8-10).

Despite the existing literature on media addiction and its psychological consequences, there remains a gap in understanding the specific mechanisms through which Korean drama addiction contributes to loneliness, frustration, and mental health problems in university students. While previous research has explored the individual impacts of excessive screen time, the serial mediation effect of loneliness and frustration in the relationship between Korean drama addiction and mental health remains largely unexplored(10-12). This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the interconnectedness of these psychological variables. Specifically, it seeks to examine the relationship between addiction to watching Korean drama series and mental health problems in university students while exploring the mediating roles of loneliness and frustration. Understanding these relationships will provide valuable insights into the psychological effects of excessive media consumption and offer evidence-based recommendations for mitigating its adverse impacts. Given the increasing reliance on digital entertainment, it is imperative to assess how excessive engagement with such content influences psychological well-being and social functioning. By examining these relationships, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on media addiction and its implications for mental health, thereby informing preventive strategies and intervention measures tailored for university students(12, 13).

## METHODS

The study employed a correlational research design to investigate the relationship between addiction to watching Korean drama series, loneliness, frustration, and mental health problems in university students. A purposive sampling strategy was utilized to recruit participants, ensuring that individuals meeting the study's criteria were included. The sample consisted of 310 university students (157 men and 153 women) enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs at public and private sector universities across various cities in Pakistan. The mean age of participants was 21.63 years ( $SD = 1.55$ ). Initially, 400 responses were collected, out of which 90 were

**Figure: Hypothesized Model of the Research**



excluded following a screening process(14). Participants eligible for inclusion were those identified as addicted to watching Korean drama series based on the Television Addiction for Korean TV Series Scale. Only regular university students enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate programs possessing personal smartphones or laptops were considered. Exclusion criteria comprised individuals working in mass media and broadcasting sectors, those with any form of physical disability (e.g., limb amputation, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, spinal cord injury), and those with pre-existing medical conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, or other chronic illnesses(15).

Demographic data revealed that the majority of participants were undergraduate students, with an approximately equal distribution of men and women. Most participants belonged to nuclear families (51.6%), while the remainder were from joint family systems (48.4%). The sample included students from both public (42.6%) and private (57.4%) sector institutions. The birth order distribution indicated that 32.9% were eldest children, 45.5% were middle-born, and 21.6% were youngest siblings(16-18). To assess addiction to Korean drama series, the study utilized the Television Addiction for Korean TV Series Scale, which comprises seven dimensions: tolerance, withdrawal, unintended use, cutting down, time spent, displacement of other activities, and continued use. Loneliness was measured using the UCLA Loneliness Scale, a 20-item instrument assessing subjective feelings of social isolation. Frustration was evaluated using the Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale, which measures autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Mental health was assessed using the Mental Health Scale, which evaluates anxiety, depression, behavioral control, and overall psychological well-being. All scales were reported to have satisfactory reliability in previous studies, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70(19).

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Research Committee of the Faculty of Psychology and the Advanced Research and Ethics Committee at Lahore Garrison University. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study, and informed consent was obtained before their participation. They were assured that their responses would remain confidential and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without consequences. Permission to use the assessment tools was secured from the respective authors(20, 21). Data collection was conducted both in-person through printed questionnaires and online via Google Forms. The questionnaire link was disseminated through social media platforms and academic networks, ensuring broad participation. University faculty members were requested to share the study link within their academic circles. The questionnaire included initial screening questions, and only students meeting the inclusion criteria were allowed to proceed. Of the 400 responses collected, 90 were excluded due to incomplete data or failure to meet eligibility criteria. The final dataset comprised 310 valid responses, which were subsequently analyzed using appropriate statistical methods(22, 23).

## RESULTS

The statistical analysis examined the relationships between addiction to watching Korean drama series, loneliness, frustration, and mental health problems among university students. Psychometric evaluation of the scales used in the study demonstrated good to moderate reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.73 to 0.87. The Addiction to Watching Korean Drama Series Scale exhibited an alpha coefficient of 0.79, the UCLA Loneliness Scale had 0.73, the Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale recorded 0.78, and the Mental Health Inventory achieved the highest reliability at 0.87. Subscales within the Mental Health Inventory, including Anxiety

(0.75), Depression (0.69), Behavioral Control (0.83), and Positive Effect (0.75), all demonstrated acceptable reliability. Correlation analysis revealed significant positive associations between addiction to watching Korean drama series and loneliness ( $r = 0.55, p < 0.01$ ), frustration ( $r = 0.42, p < 0.05$ ), depression ( $r = 0.39, p < 0.01$ ), anxiety ( $r = 0.26, p < 0.01$ ), control on behavior ( $r = 0.52, p < 0.01$ ), and positive effect ( $r = 0.28, p < 0.01$ ). Loneliness was also significantly correlated with frustration ( $r = 0.22, p < 0.01$ ), depression ( $r = 0.18, p < 0.05$ ), and anxiety ( $r = 0.22, p < 0.01$ ). Frustration showed a significant positive correlation with depression ( $r = 0.23, p < 0.01$ ) and anxiety ( $r = 0.33, p < 0.01$ ). Additionally, control of behavior was positively correlated with positive effect ( $r = 0.28, p < 0.01$ ).

Sociodemographic analysis demonstrated that age was positively correlated with program level ( $r = 0.48, p < 0.01$ ) and cumulative grade point average (CGPA) ( $r = 0.13, p < 0.05$ ). A negative correlation was found between age and average time spent watching Korean drama series ( $r = -0.17, p < 0.01$ ) and frustration ( $r = -0.13, p < 0.05$ ). Gender showed a significant negative correlation with CGPA ( $r = -0.14, p < 0.01$ ), residence ( $r = -0.13, p < 0.05$ ), family system ( $r = -0.25, p < 0.01$ ), and university sector ( $r = -0.13, p < 0.05$ ). However, no significant relationship was found between gender and addiction to watching Korean drama series, loneliness, frustration, or mental health problems. Regression analysis demonstrated that addiction to watching Korean drama series significantly predicted loneliness ( $\beta = 0.55, p < 0.001$ ). Loneliness, in turn, significantly predicted frustration ( $\beta = 0.22, p < 0.001$ ). Addiction to watching Korean drama series also significantly predicted depression ( $\beta = 0.39, p < 0.001$ ), anxiety ( $\beta = 0.26, p < 0.001$ ), control on behavior ( $\beta = 0.52, p < 0.001$ ), and positive effect ( $\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$ ). Frustration significantly predicted depression ( $\beta = 0.23, p < 0.001$ ), anxiety ( $\beta = 0.33, p < 0.001$ ), and positive effect ( $\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$ ), but negatively predicted control on behavior ( $\beta = -0.08, p = 0.08$ ).

Mediation analysis indicated that loneliness significantly mediated the relationship between addiction to watching Korean drama series and frustration ( $B = 0.12, p < 0.01$ ). However, no serial mediation effect was found for loneliness and frustration in the relationship between addiction to watching Korean drama series and positive effect, nor between addiction to watching Korean drama series and control on behavior. Gender-based comparison revealed no significant differences in addiction to watching Korean drama series between men ( $M = 125.16, SD = 14.52$ ) and women ( $M = 153.00, SD = 13.99$ ),  $t(308) = 0.23, p > 0.05, d = 0.02$ . Similarly, no significant differences were found between men and women in loneliness ( $t(308) = -1.72, p > 0.05, d = 0.08$ ), frustration ( $t(308) = 1.71, p > 0.05, d = 0.03$ ), or mental health problems ( $t(308) = 0.35, p > 0.05, d = 0.19$ ).

The findings support the hypothesis that addiction to watching Korean drama series is positively associated with loneliness, frustration, and mental health problems in university students. Loneliness was found to be a significant mediator between addiction to watching Korean drama series and frustration. However, there was no serial mediation effect of loneliness and frustration on positive effect or control on behavior. Additional mediation analysis indicated that loneliness did not significantly predict frustration ( $\beta = 0.06, p = 0.45$ ), suggesting that while loneliness was correlated with frustration, it did not serve as a strong mediator in this pathway. Similarly, frustration did not significantly predict depression ( $\beta = 0.009, p = 0.59$ ), anxiety ( $\beta = 0.011, p = 0.71$ ), control on behavior ( $\beta = -0.006, p = 0.79$ ), or positive effect ( $\beta = 0.027, p = 0.33$ ). These results suggest that while addiction to watching Korean drama series is significantly related to loneliness and frustration, the hypothesized serial mediation effect of loneliness and frustration in the relationship between addiction and mental health problems was not supported. This finding highlights the complexity of these psychological variables, indicating that other mediators or moderators may be influencing the association between addiction to Korean dramas and mental health outcomes.

**Table 1: Demographic Information of the Sample**

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Men	157	50.6
Women	153	49.4
Program		
BS Honors	222	71.6
MPhil/ MS	88	28.4
Residence		
Day scholar	180	58.1

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Hostilities	130	41.9
Family system		
Nuclear	160	51.6
Joint	150	48.4
Sector		
Public	132	42.6
Private	178	57.4
Birth order		
Eldest	102	32.9
Middle child	141	45.5
Youngest	67	21.6

Note. N=310. Participants were on average 21.63 years old (*SD*=1.55)

**Table 2: Psychometric Properties of Scales**

Scale	K	M	SD	Potential Range	Actual Range	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Addiction of Watching Korean Drama Series	35	124.98	14.24	35-175	77-164	0.79
UCLA Loneliness Scale	20	59.22	7.71	20-80	33-80	0.73
Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale	18	85.81	10.33	18-126	51-129	0.78
Mental Health Inventory	18	74.43	9.19	18-108	43-92	0.87
Anxiety	5	20.56	5	5-30	7-28	0.75
Depression	5	20.35	3.33	5-30	8-23	0.69
Behavioral Control	4	16.72	4.18	4-24	6-28	0.83
Positive Effect	4	16.79	5.15	4-24	9-35	0.75

**Table 3: Correlation Between Variables**

Variable	Loneliness	Frustration	Depression	Anxiety	Behavioral Control	Positive Effect
Addiction of Watching Korean Drama Series	0.548	0.426	0.479	0.392	0.492	0.399
Loneliness	-	0.492	0.392	0.492	0.399	0.399
Frustration	-	-	0.23	0.33	-0.08	0.28
Depression	-	-	-	0.27	0.23	0.28
Anxiety	-	-	-	-	0.33	0.28
Behavioral Control	-	-	-	-	-	0.22
Positive Effect	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 4: Model Fit Indices

Model	$\chi^2/df$	NFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Baseline Model	0.03	0.96	0.97	0.96	0.04

Table 5: Gender Differences in Variables

Variable	Men Mean (SD)	Women Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Addiction of Watching Korean Drama Series	125.16 (14.52)	153.00 (13.99)	0.23	0.082	0.02
Loneliness	59.04 (6.87)	60.49 (7.81)	-1.72	0.08	0.08
Frustration	86.47 (10.59)	86.06 (10.02)	1.71	0.73	0.03
Mental Health Problems	75.31 (9.08)	73.52 (9.24)	0.35	0.08	0.19

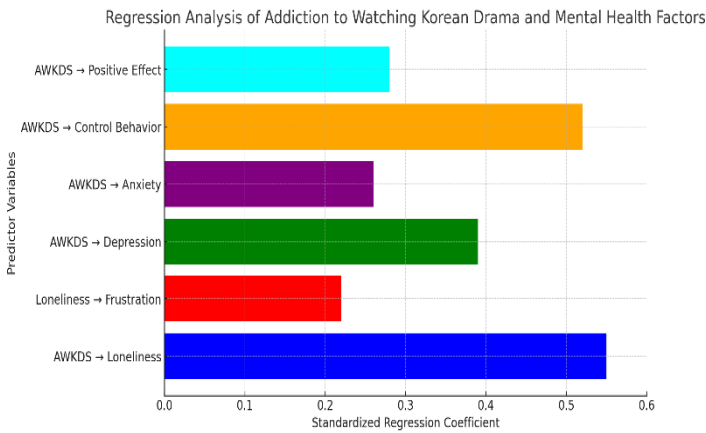


Figure 2 Regression Analysis of addiction to watching Korean Drama and Mental Health Factors

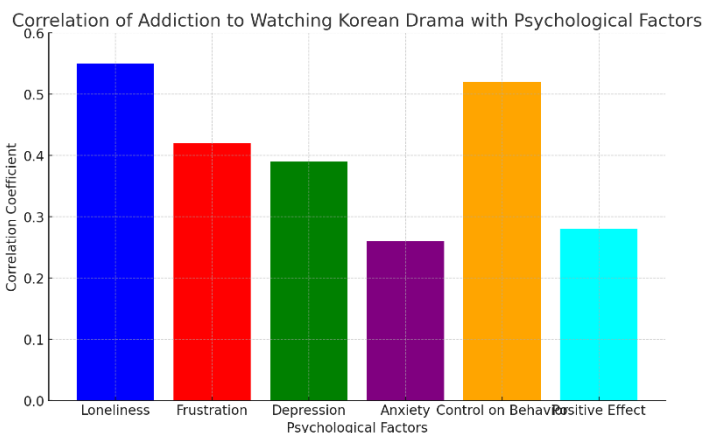


Figure 1 Correlation of Addiction to watching Korean Drama with Psychological Factors

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reinforce the understanding that excessive television viewing, particularly addiction to watching Korean drama series, is associated with psychological distress, including loneliness, frustration, and mental health issues. While intensive television consumption itself is not inherently addictive, it transitions into problematic usage when employed as a coping mechanism for emotional distress, such as loneliness and frustration. The compulsive need to watch extended hours of Korean drama series has been linked with behavioral symptoms resembling addiction, including withdrawal symptoms, loss of control, and interference with daily functioning. This pattern of excessive viewing is often motivated by a desire to escape reality, reduce stress, and alleviate psychological discomfort(24-26). The study revealed that individuals addicted to watching Korean dramas exhibited higher levels of loneliness and frustration, which, in turn, contributed to mental health issues. A significant relationship between addiction to Korean drama series and symptoms of depression and anxiety was observed, suggesting that excessive viewing may serve as both a consequence and a reinforcer of psychological distress. The link between addiction to Korean drama series and increased frustration highlights the potential adverse impact of media consumption on emotional regulation. When individuals rely on excessive television viewing as a coping strategy, it not only fails to address the underlying issues but also exacerbates emotional instability over time. The presence of frustration as a significant predictor of mental health problems underscores the need to examine maladaptive coping mechanisms among university students who engage in excessive viewing behaviors(27-29).



Despite the significant associations found, the serial mediation effect of loneliness and frustration in the relationship between addiction to watching Korean dramas and mental health problems was not statistically supported. Although loneliness mediated the link between addiction and frustration, its role in further exacerbating mental health problems was not confirmed. This suggests that additional psychological variables, such as emotional dysregulation, self-esteem, or social isolation, may play an intermediary role in this relationship. The absence of a serial mediation effect indicates that while excessive media consumption contributes to loneliness and frustration, other pathways might influence the development of mental health issues. This necessitates further investigation into additional psychological and behavioral factors that may mediate or moderate the impact of excessive viewing on mental well-being(30-32). The study also demonstrated gender-based differences in addiction to watching Korean drama series, with women scoring slightly higher than men. While previous literature suggests that men tend to engage more in gaming and action-oriented media consumption, women are more inclined toward narrative-driven entertainment, particularly dramas, which may account for this difference. However, the gender differences observed in this study were minor and did not exhibit significant variations in loneliness, frustration, or mental health problems, suggesting that the psychological impact of excessive television viewing affects both genders relatively equally(33-36).

The results further indicated that younger individuals, particularly undergraduate students, exhibited a higher tendency toward excessive viewing. This aligns with previous findings that younger individuals are more vulnerable to binge-watching due to increased accessibility to streaming platforms, flexible schedules, and heightened engagement in media consumption as a form of entertainment and escape. The negative correlation between cumulative grade point average (CGPA) and mental health problems suggests that students who maintain higher academic performance may be less prone to psychological distress, possibly due to better time management, structured routines, and higher levels of self-regulation. Conversely, students struggling academically may be more inclined toward excessive media consumption as an avoidant coping mechanism, further exacerbating their mental health challenges(36-38). The findings highlight the significant implications of excessive media consumption, particularly in the context of mental health. The use of streaming services has removed traditional viewing restrictions, allowing individuals to consume entire seasons of dramas at once, thereby increasing the likelihood of binge-watching. The absence of regulatory measures and the ease of accessibility contribute to the normalization of excessive viewing, making it more difficult for individuals to recognize problematic patterns. The study underscores the importance of promoting media literacy, self-regulation, and time management strategies to mitigate the negative consequences of excessive television consumption(39, 40).

A key strength of this study lies in its focus on a growing yet underexplored phenomenon of addiction to watching Korean drama series and its association with psychological well-being among university students. The use of validated psychometric scales enhances the reliability of findings, and the inclusion of a diverse sample from multiple universities provides a broader perspective on the issue. However, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce response biases, as participants may underreport or overestimate their viewing habits and psychological distress. Additionally, the cross-sectional design prevents the establishment of causal relationships, limiting the ability to determine whether addiction to watching Korean drama series leads to psychological distress or whether individuals with pre-existing mental health issues are more likely to engage in excessive viewing. Future research should employ longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of excessive media consumption and identify potential causal mechanisms(41, 42). The study also emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to address excessive television consumption and its psychological implications. University counseling services and mental health professionals should incorporate media-related behavioral assessments into their interventions, helping students develop healthier coping strategies. The findings may inform policymakers, educators, and healthcare professionals about the risks associated with uncontrolled media consumption, prompting initiatives to promote balanced viewing habits. Furthermore, future research should expand the scope of investigation by comparing the psychological impact of different types of television series, such as Turkish, Japanese, or Indian dramas, to determine whether the observed effects are specific to Korean dramas or extend to other genres(43).

Given the increasing prevalence of digital media consumption, there is a pressing need to examine its broader impact on mental health, social interactions, and academic performance. The current study contributes to the understanding of this issue by shedding light on the relationship between addiction to watching Korean drama series, loneliness, frustration, and mental health problems. By addressing the psychological factors associated with excessive media consumption, future studies can develop effective interventions aimed at fostering healthier viewing habits and improving overall well-being.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the strong association between excessive television viewing, particularly addiction to Korean drama series, and psychological distress, including loneliness, frustration, and mental health issues among university students. Individuals often turn to excessive media consumption as a coping mechanism for stress and emotional discomfort, leading to patterns of dependency that may exacerbate their psychological struggles. While some viewers engage with television for entertainment and socialization, those who use it as an escape or avoidance strategy are more likely to experience distressing symptoms. The study underscores the importance of fostering healthier viewing habits and implementing interventions that encourage balanced media consumption to mitigate its potential negative impact on mental well-being. Addressing underlying emotional and behavioral factors that drive excessive viewing can help individuals develop more effective coping strategies, ultimately contributing to improved mental health and overall quality of life.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author	Contribution
Areej Fatima*	Substantial Contribution to study design, analysis, acquisition of Data
	Manuscript Writing
	Has given Final Approval of the version to be published

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