

## Impact of Binge Watching On Mental Health of Students

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### ABSTRACT

This quantitative study examines binge-watching's impact on higher education students' mental health within India's high-pressure academic environment and rapidly growing OTT sector. Through stratified random sampling, 1,180 Indian undergraduates and postgraduates completed the Psychological Well-Being Scale ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ). SPSS regression analysis revealed a strong negative relationship ( $\beta = -0.913$ ,  $R^2 = 0.834$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with each unit increase in binge-watching predicting a 0.895-unit decline in mental health scores thereby rejecting the null hypothesis. Findings highlight binge-watching as a key risk factor via sleep disruption, emotional attachments, isolation, and addiction patterns, urging targeted student interventions...

**Keywords:** binge-watching, mental health, higher education students, psychological well-being, regression analysis, OTT streaming

### INTRODUCTION:

India's heavy emphasis on academic success quietly harms students' mental health. In large cities, three out of five students face anxiety, but most stay quiet due to shame and fear of judgment. The constant need to outperform others and meet tough goals leads to worry, tiredness, and sadness. Social media hides these problems behind pictures of perfect lives, while students struggle under growing pressure (India Today, 2025). With high academic stress, many Indian students resort to escapism through video games or binge-watching. Mental health specialists highlight that this evasion intensifies psychological strain (Chaturvedi, 2025). This trend matches India's fast-growing OTT industry, fueled by inexpensive internet, high smartphone penetration, and shows in local languages. Experts predict \$5 billion in revenue by 2026, over 660 million users by 2030, and ad-supported streaming (AVOD) pushing total earnings past \$9.17 billion by decade's end (Statista, 2026).

On one hand, binge-watching draws criticism for its potential mental health risks, on the other hand, researchers also suggest it may yield mental health benefits. It can spark dopamine surges, encourage downtime, and alleviate tension by providing the brain a temporary escape from daily strains (Dahal, 2025).

The current study aims to examine the influence of binge-watching on higher education students' mental health across demographics like gender, region, qualification, and academic streams.

*H0: There is no statistically significant relationship between binge-watching and students' mental health.*

### 2.Literature Review

#### 2.1. Binge Watching and Mental Health

Binge-watching has emerged as a widespread form of relaxation and entertainment, and in the past few years it has attracted growing scholarly attention (Elkholy et al., 2024). Binge-watching involves consecutively viewing multiple episodes of streamed content like Netflix shows. Traditional TV was limited by weekly schedules, but streaming now delivers full seasons instantly on demand. Studies show this habit ties to better well-being (Pittman & Steiner, 2021), closer social ties (Rubenking & Bracken, 2022), and more enjoyment and focus during sessions (Erickson et al., 2019). Yet, researchers increasingly highlight potential adverse effects of this habit (Subramanian & Das, 2024).

Recent studies show a strong link between teens' and adults' psychological well-being and their physical and mental health (Tang et al., 2019). Mental well-being research has grown because experts now see it goes beyond just not feeling sick, instead, this subject area needs its separate focused attention. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2025) says good mental health means handling life's ups and downs, using your strengths, doing well at school or work, and helping your community. Research has empirically examined the links between binge-watching behaviors and mental health outcomes. These connections align with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, as individuals often engage in

binge-watching to fulfill specific psychological needs (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). The Uses and Gratifications Theory further suggests that individuals derive satisfaction from media consumption, especially when it is intentional (Pittman & Steiner, 2021). In contrast, binge-watching often unfolds spontaneously, for instance, when viewers intend to limit their viewing but struggle to stop. Consequently, this impulsive pattern can lead to post-viewing regret and exacerbate mental health issues (Pittman & Steiner, 2021).

Binge-watching also correlates with several downsides, such as irregular sleep, lower productivity at work, health risks from inactivity, and mental health challenges like depression, anxiety, and isolation (Alfonsi et al., 2023; Tolba & Zoghaib, 2022).

## 2.2. Depression and Anxiety

Depression and anxiety are common mental health problems that often occur together, harming overall well-being. The World Health Organization views depression as a leading global concern (Raza et al., 2021), and both conditions connect to heavy social media use (Raza et al., 2021). Binge-watching web series—viewing many episodes in one go—worsens these issues. Shows with perfect lives can leave viewers feeling sad, lonely, or empty, known as "post-series depression" (Shensa et al., 2016; Steins-Loeber et al., 2020; Kottasz et al., 2019).

Alimoradi et al. (2022) found strong links between binge-watching and depression, poor sleep, anxiety, stress, and loneliness in 39 studies. These ties strengthened during COVID-19, hitting developing countries harder. Starosta et al. (2021) showed anxiety-depression symptoms fuel problematic binge-watching through motives like escapism and easing loneliness. Binge-watching raises depression and anxiety risks overall (Alimoradi et al., 2022; Starosta et al., 2021).

## 2.3. Stress

Psychological stress occurs when changes burden a person's body, emotions, or mind (Robinson, 2018). Studies divide stress signs into behavioral, emotional, and cognitive types, such as agitation, mood swings, insomnia, anger, self-neglect, and focus loss (Lemola et al., 2015). Cognitive-behavioral models position stress as a core factor in addictive digital media patterns (Li et al., 2019). Digital use can generate stress, causing issues like emotional ups and downs (Lemenager et al., 2021), restlessness (Lemola et al., 2015), higher stress perception (Garbóczy et al., 2021), and sleep interference (van der Schuur et al., 2019), yet it also acts as a go-to coping strategy.

Under pressure, many turn to binge-watching on video-on-demand (VoD) platforms to handle overwhelming daily challenges (Wang, 2019). This calming effect sparks initial and repeated sessions (Flayelle et al., 2019). Anxiety drops after each episode, prompting viewers to keep going for more relief (Panda & Pandey, 2017).

## 2.4. Fatigue and Sleep Quality

Castro et al. (2019) found viewers often feel unhappy returning to reality after binge sessions. Problematic binge-watchers frequently skip sleep for more episodes,

leading to fatigue and lower school performance (Chambliss et al., 2017; Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017). Vinothkumar & George (2022) revealed strong links between heavy binge-watching, exhaustion, and poor sleep quality, suggesting targeted sleep interventions could help.

Excessive media disrupts sleep patterns (Dworak et al., 2007), though binge-watching research remains limited. Heavy binge-watchers report more insomnia than regular TV viewers due to bedtime rumination (Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017), while late-night sessions specifically cut sleep duration (Oberschmidt, 2017), highlighting mixed evidence needing further study.

## 2.5. Behavioral Addiction

Binge-watching acts like addictions such as gaming, with cravings, control loss, impulsivity, brain pleasure hits, and ignoring harms despite quit tries (Grant et al., 2010; Pierce-Grove, 2017; Riddle et al., 2017; Flayelle et al., 2019; Starosta et al., 2019; Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017; Sussman & Moran, 2013). High viewing ties to self-control struggles, but heavy watching alone isn't always bad—motives matter, like stress reliance versus fun (Flayelle et al., 2017; De Feijter et al., 2016; Devasagayam, 2014; Hasan et al., 2018; Tukachinsky & Eyal, 2018; Riddle et al., 2018; Shim & Kim, 2018; Orosz et al., 2016; Sussman & Moran, 2013; Ort et al., 2021). It ranges from healthy leisure to risky excess, needing more research amid mixed results (Favieri et al., 2023; Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020).

Despite emerging evidence linking excessive binge-watching to poorer mental health outcomes (Favieri et al., 2023), existing research reveals key gaps in understanding its full spectrum i.e. from harmless leisure to addictive excess that disrupts daily life. While studies highlight a continuum where moderate viewing tied to passion or relaxation may hold psychological benefits, the tipping point into problematic patterns involving other factors like self-control and emotional coping remains unclear (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020). Inconsistent findings across contexts further cloud the exact nature of binge-watching's relationship with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and addiction, underscoring the need for more targeted studies to pinpoint intervention thresholds and boundary conditions.

## 3. Methodology

This study adopted a positivist philosophy and quantitative methodology to examine binge-watching's impact on higher education students' mental health. An exploratory research design suited this emerging topic, enabling pattern identification across demographics without preconceived causal assumptions. Data came from both secondary literature reviews using structured searches of academic sources on binge-watching and psychological effects and primary surveys with 1,180 Indian undergraduates and postgraduates, selected via stratified random sampling by gender, region, qualification, and academic stream.

This study used The Psychological Well-Being Scale (Sisodia & Choudhary, 2012; reliability  $\alpha=0.87$ ) to measure mental health aspects. Questionnaires were

distributed both online (via Google Forms with IP restrictions for single responses) and offline (in institutes after ethics approval), ensuring broad reach while upholding informed consent, anonymity, and withdrawal rights.

SPSS version 20 was used to conduct regression analysis and ANOVA, alongside descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, charts) to summarize binge-watching habits.

This mixed online-offline approach, rigorous sampling, and validated scale ensured objective, generalizable insights into student behaviors, aligning with positivism's focus on measurable patterns for future interventions.

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1. Descriptive Analysis

Gender: Of 1,180 respondents, females comprised 56% (n=662) and males 44% (n=518), showing balanced but slightly female-dominant representation.

Region: Central region dominated at 40%, followed by West (20%), East (17%), South (13%), and North (10%), reflecting geographic diversity.

Qualification: Undergraduates formed the majority (66%, n=784), with postgraduates at 34% (n=396).

Stream: Management led (41%, n=481), followed by Engineering (32%, n=376) and Law (27%, n=323).

Binge-Watching Frequency: Most watched 3-4 times weekly (52%, n=613), followed by weekends (18%, n=218), daily (13%, n=154), and rarely (17%, n=195).

Daily Hours: Heavy viewing prevailed at 2-4 hours (69%, n=820), with 1.5-2 hours (21%, n=243) and >4 hours (10%, n=117).

##### 4.2. Regression Analysis

For this study, the regression analysis, with mental health as the outcome variable and binge-watching as the key predictor, reveals a clear link between the two.

**Table 4.30. Model Summary Mental Health<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.913 <sup>a</sup>	.834	.833	1.4675	2.091

a. Predictors: (Constant), BINGE WATCHING

b. Dependent Variable: MENTAL HEALTH

This model indicates a robust negative link between binge-watching and mental health (R = 0.913). The R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.834 means binge-watching alone accounts for

83.4% of the changes in mental health scores, marking it as a strong influence on participants' mental health.

**Table 4.31. ANOVA Mental Health<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	12707.380	1	12707.380	5900.843	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	2536.806	1178	2.153		
	Total	15244.186	1179			

a. Dependent Variable: MENTAL HEALTH

b. Predictors: (Constant), BINGE WATCHING

The ANOVA confirms the model's statistical strength (F = 5900.843, p < .001), showing that adding binge-

watching greatly enhances predictions of mental health compared to no predictors.

**Table 4.32. Coefficients Mental Health<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	57.674	.285		202.346	.000
BINGE WATCHING	-.895	.012	-.913	-76.817	.000

a. Dependent Variable: MENTAL HEALTH

The intercept (57.674) shows predicted mental health with no binge-watching. The binge-watching coefficient (-0.895, SE = 0.012; t = -76.817, p < .001) reveals that each one-unit rise in binge-watching lowers mental health by 0.895 units. The beta (-0.913) reinforces this strong inverse effect.

Overall, higher binge-watching predicts worse mental health, possibly from inactivity, sleep issues, or stressful content.

## 5. Discussion

The findings confirm a robust inverse association between binge-watching and mental health ( $\beta = -0.913$ ), where greater viewing intensity predicts substantial declines in mental health scores (0.895 units per unit increase), aligning with patterns of reduced activity, sleep disruption, and emotional overload from immersive content. This relationship extends beyond immediate effects, as series finales provoke "post-series sadness" and detachment struggles (Steins-Loeber et al., 2020), fostering emotional insecurity and attachment issues through parasocial bonds that mirror and strain real-world relationships (Shensa et al., 2016; Wheeler, 2015). Loneliness paradoxically fuels this cycle, drawing individuals, especially students, toward binge-watching for temporary escape, only for it to amplify isolation, anxiety, depression, and exhaustion (Gabbadini et al., 2021; Siraj, 2023). Such patterns echo uses and gratifications theory, offering short-term relief from stress (Starosta & Izydorczyk, 2020; Wang, 2019), yet social comparison to idealized characters heightens inadequacy (Vaterlaus et al., 2019), while addiction-like symptoms emerge: hyperactivity, impulsivity, escapism, avoidance, low life satisfaction, and eroded self-control (Pontes et al., 2016; Flayelle et al., 2019; Pittman & Steiner, 2021).

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Sleep impairments intensify these risks, producing insomnia and fatigue more severely than traditional TV (Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017; Chambliss et al., 2017; Siraj, 2023), with individual moderators like stress and timing explaining variability (Oberschmidt, 2017) and bidirectional ties to mental health decline (Lemola et al., 2015). Physically, the habit displaces exercise that result in guilt (Steinbach, 2018). Collectively, these outcomes resemble behavioral addictions, sustained by dopamine-driven loss of control despite evident harms (Pierce-Grove, 2017; Grant et al., 2010; De Feijter et al., 2016), underscoring binge-watching's dual role as coping mechanism and mental health threat.

## 6. Conclusion

The evidence from this study clearly demonstrates binge-watching's detrimental influence on students' mental health, explaining over 83% of score variance through interconnected pathways of sleep loss, emotional dependency, social withdrawal, and compulsive tendencies. This holds particular urgency in India's competitive academic landscape where students already face intense pressures.

Educational institutions must implement practical measures like mindful viewing guidelines, sleep education programs, alternative stress management workshops, to help students balance digital entertainment with well-being. Policymakers should consider media literacy initiatives highlighting these risks within school curricula.

Future research directions include longitudinal tracking of viewing patterns, testing intervention effectiveness, and exploring cultural or demographic moderators. Ultimately, transforming binge-watching from psychological threat to healthy recreation requires collective action across education, mental health services, and streaming platforms.

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