

Environmental and Behavioral Patterns in Patients with Problematic Interactive Media Use (PIMU)

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Background

- Extensive, uncontrolled interactive media use (i.e. PIMU) negatively impacts the mental, social, and physical well-being of adolescents
- There are limited clinical data describing the life experiences of this patient population

Aims

1. Identify patterns in behavior, environment, and relationship-based circumstances that may serve as predictors and inform clinical care of PIMU
2. Determine the types of events that prompt parents or families to seek treatment for PIMU

Methods

- Qualitative review of first session clinical notes
- Sample: **200 patients** (173 male), **9-24 years old**, seen at a specialty clinic from November 2018 to November 2021
- Four coders had average agreement of 72.6% (~23% coded by multiple researchers)
- Applied emergent themes approach and identified commonalities among patients' experiences with PIMU, home environments, social histories, school experiences, and related behaviors and situations

Results

- **Onset** of PIMU frequently associated with:
 - receiving a new device (e.g., first cellphone)
 - early exposure to interactive media
 - experience of a significant life event or change in psychosocial environment (e.g., moving, divorce, remote schooling)
- **PIMU frequently comorbid** with ADHD, ASD, anxiety, depression, and other psychiatric and behavioral disorders
- **Indicators** of PIMU included a decline in academic performance, withdrawal from activities, and/or escalations in aggressive behavior

Exemplar Quotes

Onset:

Receiving a device

"Her media usage really started to increase around 5th grade, at which time she had been required by her school to start using an iPad for class and homework assignments."

Indicator:

Reduction in school performance

"[Patient]'s biggest impairment [due] to his online behavior has been school performance. His grades dropped dramatically, A to Fs in 6 weeks."

Emerging Cycle:

Dysregulation and aggression toward media limits

"Even initiating a conversation about possible future limits on screen use may result in emotional dysregulation and [destruction] of property as well as risk of his being physically aggressive."

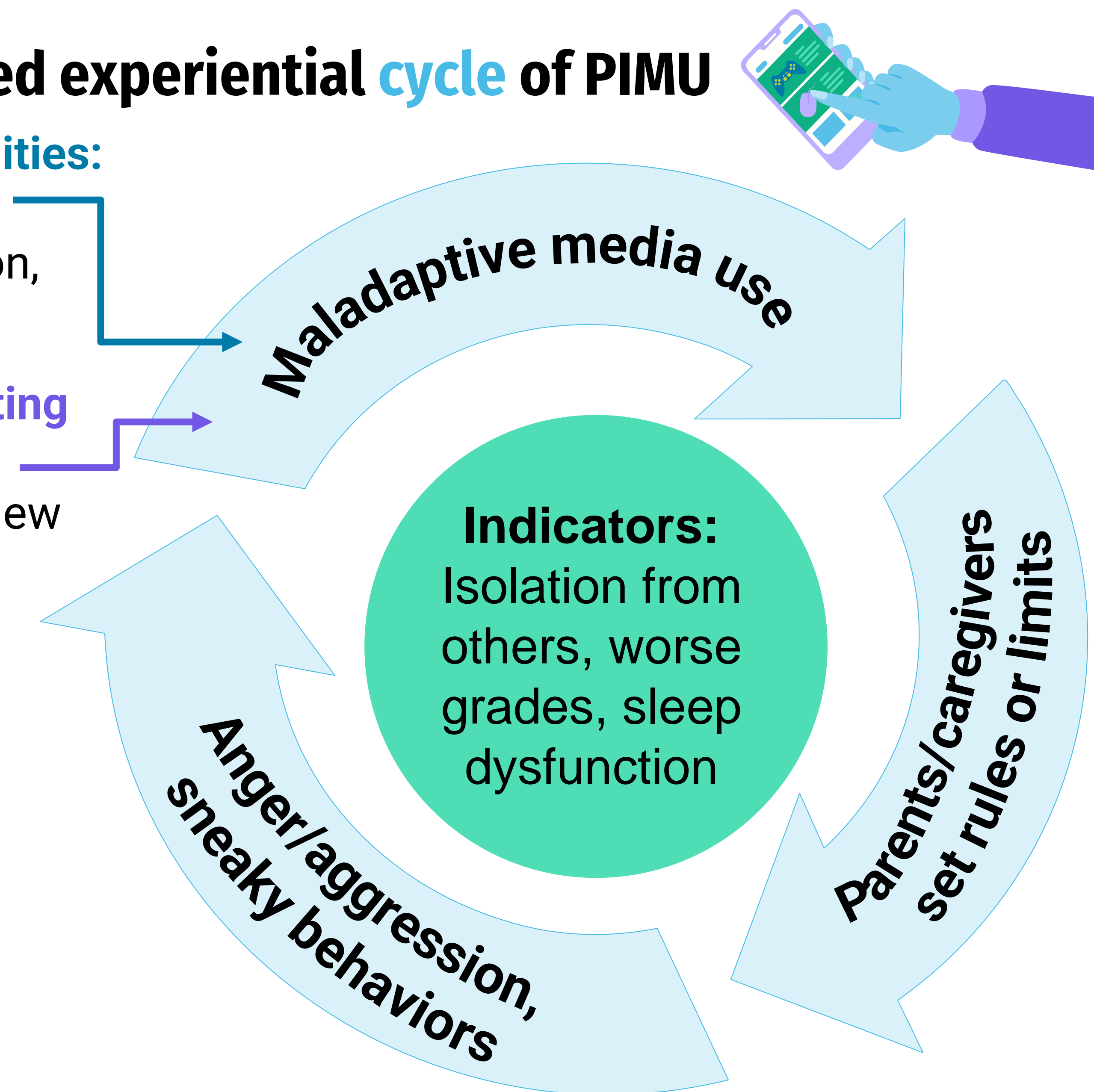
Observed experiential cycle of PIMU

Comorbidities:

ADHD, Depression, Anxiety

Precipitating incident:

Divorce, new school, moving



Conclusion

- Preexisting undiagnosed or undertreated psychiatric and behavioral disorders can manifest as PIMU, often triggered by significant changes to a youth's psychosocial environment or routine
- Clinicians can screen for distinct "red flags" in their patients: decline in academic performance, withdrawal from activities, and escalations in aggressive behavior
- PIMU patients' resistance to restrictions set by parents/caregivers often culminates in more aggressive and maladaptive behavior

Tips & Resources

- Engaging the patient in developing and taking ownership of plan for regulating use is important for successful treatment
- Resources for parents/caregivers and clinicians can be found at digitalwellnesslab.org

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