

Episode: *Author Interview: "The Internet and Loneliness"*

Guest: Andrew P. Smith, PhD

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript by: Cheryl Green

[Access the podcast.](#)

[bright theme music]

[00:00:04] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I'm your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Andrew P. Smith, a professor of psychology and the director of the Centre for Occupational Health Psychology at Cardiff University in the United Kingdom. He's here to discuss his article, coauthored with Dr Hasah Alheneidi, "*The Internet and Loneliness*," in the November 2023 issue of the Journal, [Health and Loneliness](#). Dr Smith, thank you so much for being on the podcast. [music fades]

DR ANDREW SMITH: Thank you. I'm delighted to be here.

[00:00:45] HOFF: So, to begin with, what's the main ethics point that you and Dr Alheneidi are making in your article?

SMITH: Well, both loneliness and Internet addiction are potential health issues and certainly affect people's well-being. And I think the main issue for ethics is really knowing precisely what information one should make ethical judgments about the extent of the problem and also possible ways of dealing with it.

[00:01:21] HOFF: And so, what do you see as the most important thing for health professions students and trainees specifically to take from this article?

SMITH: I think there are two things. I think, first of all, an awareness of the extensive literature on potential negative effects of loneliness and the potential problems of excessive Internet use, and secondly, how these two factors actually are related to one another. So, it's what we call a bidirectional relationship. So, loneliness can lead to greater Internet use, which can potentially lead to Internet addiction and its negative side effects. But looking at it from the other direction, excessive Internet use can mean that you neglect your normal social relationships and hence that in turn can lead to an increase in loneliness.

[00:02:19] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to this article that you didn't have the time or the space to fully explore, what would that be?

SMITH: I think there are two things, and they are implicit in the article, although probably haven't been developed to the extent that we would've liked to have done. And one is that this really is a worldwide issue. It's something which has been shown to occur in most cultures, especially during the COVID epidemic. And secondly, the extent of it can be seen by the fact that it occurs across the lifespan. So, it's there in schoolchildren, it's there with working-age adults, and to some extent, it's now been shown to be there with the elderly, where issues of loneliness can often be bigger than earlier in life. [theme music returns]

[00:03:15] HOFF: Dr Smith, thank you so much again for your time on the podcast, and thanks to you and your coauthor for your contribution to the Journal this month.

SMITH: Thank you.

HOFF: To read the full article as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, [journalofethics.org](http://journalofethics.org). We'll be back soon with more Ethics Talk from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.