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Does internet dependence affect young people's psycho-social status? Intrafamilial and social relations, impulse control, coping ability and body image



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relation between internet dependence in university students in late adolescence and self-image. The research group consisted of first year university students studying in various departments of the Karadeniz Technical University Fatih Faculty of Education. The study was performed with 623 students, 454 female and 169 male. The Internet Dependence Questionnaire, the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire and a Personal Data Form were used for data collection. Pearson product moment coefficient and multiple linear regression analysis results showed that students' internet dependence was significantly negatively correlated with the self-image subdimensions intrafamilial and social relations, impulse control, coping ability and body image. Multiple linear regression analysis showed that the self-image subdimensions of intrafamilial and social relations and impulse control subdimensions significantly predict internet dependence.

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1. Introduction

Studies and recent reports by international organizations show that internet users comprise 42.3% of the world population, that levels of internet use increased by 741% between 2000 and 2014, and that Turkey is one of the 20 countries with the largest numbers of internet users (in 18th position) (Internet World Stats, 2015). Statistics for Turkey as a whole reveal a considerable increase in the number of internet users between 2004 (26.6%) and 2014 (62.9%), and that the 16–24 group has the highest level of internet use (73%) (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2015). This widespread use of the internet, especially among young people, in Turkey and worldwide raises the issues of the causes and consequences of use (Odacı & Çirikçi, 2014).

The fact that young people, and adolescents in particular, are the group that most use the internet (Kaltiala-Heino, Lintonene, & Rimpela, 2004; Subrahmanyam & Lin, 2007) leads to the assumption that it is adolescents who may be most affected by the adverse psychological and social impacts of the internet (Kim et al., 2006).

Since adolescents often use the internet and have yet to achieve psychological maturity, they represent a group at potential risk of developing internet dependence. When the internet is not used appropriately there is a potential issue of an adverse impact and potential dependence (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2000; Nalwa & Anand, 2003; Niemz, Griffiths, & Banyard, 2005). For that reason, internet use represents a physical, psychological and social threat to adolescents (Ceyhan & Ceyhan, 2008; Tsai & Lin, 2003).

Adolescence is a critical period when the individual experiences intense confusion in terms of social development. Emergence of emotional independence from the family and development of gender-appropriate social roles through the establishment of an individual system of values and social roles are expected to occur during this time. Adolescents are intensively preoccupied with identity and identity-related issues during this time and perform various identity experiments. By questioning the structure of their identities they are able to establish a positive or negative identity structure in respect of themselves, their families and their surroundings (Dolgin, 2010; Erikson, 1968). Family attitudes in this period play an important role in the development of the adolescent's identity (Vidinlioglu, 2010). Oppressive and authoritarian attitudes or neglectful ones on the other hand, may lead

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adolescents to experience conflict and to express themselves in the virtual world by distancing themselves from their families (Burger, 2005; Huang et al., 2009; Yen, Yen, Chen, Chen, & Ko, 2007). Ayas and Horzum (2013) suggested that adolescents who do not receive the necessary support from their families and who experience problems with them seek to express themselves in the virtual world and that internet dependence may develop when family interest is not forthcoming.

Adolescence is a time when young people concentrate on physical attraction and feelings about their own bodies. Together with rapid physical growth, disproportions in parts of the body and adolescent spots are also seen during this period. This unattractive change has a negative impact on adolescents' perceptions of their own bodies (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2004). Considering that peer acceptance and social approval are priority issues during this time, rejection, mockery and exclusion by peers due to appearance is one of the problems experienced by adolescents (Bruyn & Van den Boom, 2005; Davison & McCabe, 2006). Introversion, embarrassment and social isolation may be seen in adolescents under such conditions (Grohol, 1999; Oyserman & Markus, 1990; Xiuqin et al., 2010). It appears inevitable that adolescents who are unsuccessful in social relations, or who perceive face-to-face interaction as threatening and accordingly develop an appropriate identity structure, will turn to virtual communication (Caplan, 2003; Mittal, Tessner, & Walker, 2007). Since adolescents are able to keep their identities secret in the virtual environment they experience no fear of rejection, face-to-face encounters, humiliation or judgment by others. They are thus easily able to achieve approval and acceptance in communications established through the internet (Tsai & Lin, 2003). This makes on-line communication popular with adolescents, and they can turn internet use into dependence by the expenditure of excessive amounts of time on-line (Lin & Tsai, 2002).

Another phenomenon appearing at this time is intense interest in sexuality resulting from sexual maturation. Adolescents concentrate their entire attention on sexual impulses and being attractive to the opposite sex (Dolgin, 2010). Young people who do not consider themselves attractive, in other words who have negative body perception and little opportunity to flirt can more easily satisfy sexual stimulation and impulses to achieve sexual satisfaction in virtual environments than in real life (Tamam, 2015; Young, 1997). Research shows that individuals who cannot control their impulses, and particularly sexual impulses, use the internet in a more dependent manner (Caplan, 2003; te Wildt, Putzig, Zedler, & Ohlmeier, 2007). In addition to sexual impulses that are not welcomed but repressed by society, individuals also seek to satisfy aggressive impulses by playing games with aggressive content on the internet. Research confirms that there are positive relations between internet dependence and aggressive tendencies (Ko, Yen, Liu, Huang, & Yen, 2009; Odacı & Çelik, 2013; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995). This research reveals that the internet is regarded as indispensable for satisfying impulses.

Adolescence is a time of critical conflicts and complexities. The adolescent has a number of developmental tasks during this time, such as acquiring an identity, assuming responsibility for his life, occupation selection, socialization and approaching the other sex (Erikson, 1968). If the individual's perceptions regarding coping with these tasks are negative, then it is to be expected that he will turn to behaviors that create dependence, one form of passive coping. Dependent behaviors that represent a source of easing in the short term make the problem more complex in the long term (Tamam, 2015). Research shows that individuals with negative coping perceptions use the internet in a more dependent manner (Lam, Peng, Mai, & Jing, 2009; Milani, Osualdella, & Di Blasio, 2009). The virtual environment affords the adolescent an opportunity to draw away or make a mental journey away from the stress and

difficulties experienced in real life by creating a new identity and bestow a short-lived pleasure (Tamam, 2015). In the light of all these findings, a negative multidimensional sense of identity may indicate that adolescents are at risk of internet dependence.

Dependent internet use has adverse psychological and social effects on adolescents. Research has shown that internet dependence or unhealthy/pathological internet use can lead to academic failure, social isolation and adverse emotional states such as anxiety, depression and loneliness, to negative behavior such as lying and aggression, and to unhealthy development in variables associated with quality of life, such as subjective well-being, self-esteem, self-perception and satisfaction with life (Çelik & Odacı, 2012; 2013; Cotton, Ford, Ford, & Hale, 2012; Hardie & Tee, 2007; Kim & Davis, 2009; Lelkes, 2013; Odacı & Çelik, 2013; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008; Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006; Zhang & Kaufman, 2015).

Internet dependence, which has such an adverse impact on the lives of young people, is thought to be capable of adversely affecting identity and self-image that adolescents have newly begun developing in this period, to problems in self-images concerning the family, surroundings and the individual and to their failing to complete this period in a healthy manner (Odacı & Çıkrıkçı, 2014). On the basis of these hypotheses, this study was intended to examine the association between adolescent university students' internet dependence and self-image. The purpose was thus to reveal the adverse effects of internet dependence on adolescents' identity structures within a context of cause and effect. The research sought to answer the following questions: (1) Is students' internet dependence significantly correlated with the self-image subdimensions family relations, impulse control, coping, body image and social relations (2) Do the self-image subdimensions family relations, impulse control, coping, body image and social relations significantly predict internet dependence?

2. Method

2.1. Research group

The research group consisted of first-year students from various departments (Psychological counseling and guidance, mathematics, class teacher, science, pre-school, music, computer and special education) of the KTU Fatih Faculty of Education. Students were selected using random sampling. The study was performed with 623 students, 454 female and 169 male, with a mean age of 19.11 (SD = .91) (Table 1).

2.2. Data collection tools

The Internet Dependence Questionnaire (IDQ), the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire (OSIQ) and Personal Data Form (PDF) were used for data collection.

2.2.1. Internet dependence questionnaire

Adapted by Young (1996) from the DSM-IV "Pathological Gambling" scales, the scale consists of 20 items. The IDQ is a six-point Likert-type scale, subjects being asked to mark one option from "never," "rarely," "sometimes," "often," "very often" or "regularly." Higher scores are interpreted as representing greater internet dependence. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Bayraktar (2001) and has a Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of .91 and a Spearman–Brown value of .87.

2.2.2. Offer Self-Image Questionnaire

Developed by Offer and Howard (1972) in order to determine the characteristics of normal adolescence, the scale consists of 99

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