



# The relationship of self-perception, personality and high school type with the level of problematic internet use in adolescents<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

As adolescents spend a substantial part of the day using internet, they constitute one of the risk groups for problematic internet use. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between problematic internet use and the self-perception, personality type, gender of adolescents, and how these relationships varied depending on the type of high school the students attended. This study was conducted with 771 students studying at Anatolian high schools, science high schools, arts high schools, vocational high schools for girls, vocational technical high schools, trade vocational high schools, and common high schools in the city of Kars, Turkey. In this study, 433 (56.2%) of the participants were girls, while 338 (43.8%) were boys. The forms, scales and questionnaires administered during the study included the Personal Information Form, the Problematic Internet Use Scale, the Self-Perception Scale for Adolescents, and Eysenck's Personality Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression analysis and the one way ANOVA test. The present study examined whether personality type (extraversion, neuroticism, lie and psychoticism), self-perception (romantic appeal, physical appearance, social acceptance/close friendship, behavioral conduct, athletic competence and job competence), gender, and duration of internet use can predict problematic internet use. Based on the study results, it was observed that gender, duration of internet use, lying type personality, neuroticism, psychoticism, romantic appeal, physical appearance and behavioral conduct were significant predictors of problematic internet use, while positive attributes such as extraversion, athletic competence, job competence, and social acceptance/close friendship were not. Moreover, it was determined that the type of high school led to significant differences with regards to problematic internet use among students, and that students at technical high school were more prone to problematic internet use.

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## 1. Introduction

As the means and opportunities for accessing the internet have increased considerably, problematic internet use (PIU) has become a significant problem worldwide, especially among adolescents. Although it is suggested that problematic internet use causes dissonance in academic life, anxiety disorder, sleep deprivation, depression, and problems in the relationships with family and friends; there is still ongoing debate on whether problematic internet use should be accepted as a form of addiction (Ceyhan and

Ceyhan, 2011; Solmaz, Belli, & Saygılı, 2011). For this reason, although problematic internet use is not yet officially considered as a disorder, it has been increasingly accepted in recent years as a behavioral problem, particularly among adolescents (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Lenihan, 2007; Young, 2010). For example, Douglas et al. (2008) define problematic internet use as, “an individual's inability to control their urge of excessive internet use, which in turn leads to feelings of distress and functional impairment of daily activities”. Defining the same concept as “a rising tension or arousal experienced before internet use and a sense of relief or pleasure experienced after internet access”, Shapira et al. (2003) described this construct as an impulse control disorder and defined two main traits in individuals who are prone to problematic internet use. These traits were explained as “(1) excessive use of the internet for periods of time longer than planned, or a preoccupation with use of the internet that are

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experienced as irresistible,” and “(2) a preoccupation with the internet that starts to cause impairment in social, occupational and family relations”. In contrast to other researchers, Rice (2005) preferred to use the concept of internet addiction rather than problematic internet use, defining it as “an obsessive predisposition of internet use” that prevents the individual from continuing their daily life and shortens their duration of sleep.

Based on these discussions, Ceyhan and Ceyhan (2014) did not use the commonly preferred term “internet addiction” to define the problems caused by internet use, or to describe its unhealthy usage. This is because the concept of internet addiction does not reflect the excessive use of internet accurately, and does not involve symptoms and behaviors such as physical deprivation, which are similar to those observed in chemical substance addictions. In support of this view, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V) - the latest version of which was published in 2013 - does not contain a category for internet addiction, although it does define internet gaming addiction (Ceyhan & Ceyhan, 2014). Furthermore, since there is no consensus in the literature on whether problematic internet use should be defined as a separate diagnostic category, using concepts such as problematic or excessive internet use instead of internet addiction seems to be more appropriate.

Certain researchers, on the other hand, consider the concept of addiction appropriate, and associate internet addiction with excessively repeated online activities that are similar to the symptoms leading to substance abuse (Yellowlees & Marks, 2007). They highlighted that activities such as excessive online gaming (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012), excessive online gambling (Griffiths & Parke, 2010), and excessive use of social networking sites (van den Eijnden, Meerkerk, Vermulst, Spijkerman, & Engels, 2008) are fairly common.

Adolescents, who view the internet as an indispensable part of their daily lives, constitute the most important risk group in terms of problematic internet use (Ceyhan & Ceyhan, 2014; Lam, 2015). According to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), the most intense internet use in Turkey is observed among the youth between the ages of 16 and 24, with 73% of this age group being active users. The same data indicates that 91.7% of students in Turkey regularly use the internet (TUIK, 2014). Even though the internet - which, as mentioned above, is a particularly preferred pastime for young populations around the world and in Turkey - may be beneficial for the development of adolescents when used properly, it may also be harmful for their development when used excessively, causing various psychological, physiological and social problems in school as well as in professional and family life (Greenfield & Yan, 2006; Lam, 2015). It is known that adolescents mostly use the internet to visit social networking sites, play games, send e-mails, listen to music, watch movies, chat, exchange information, and for entertainment purposes. Since the internet is a media which can be accessed rather easily and cheaply, internet use has rapidly spread among adolescents, leading to the argument that adolescents are represent the age group most adversely affected from problematic internet use (Greenfield & Yan, 2006).

In this context, various studies in both national and international literature demonstrate that problematic internet use is significantly correlated with personality traits such as depression, introversion, low self-confidence, shyness and social anxiety (Amichai-Hamburger, 2002; Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010). These studies have also revealed a positive correlation between psychoticism and neuroticism and problematic internet use, although problematic internet use does not seem to be significantly related with other personality traits (Yao, He, Ko, & Pang, 2014; Yao et al., 2014). Furthermore, several studies have pointed out that adolescents with internet addiction are more prone to other

behavioral addictions such as substance abuse, excessive video gaming and pathological gambling (Ko et al., 2010). It has also been demonstrated that internet addiction is correlated with social anxiety and peer relationships (Zorbaz and Tuzgöl Dost, 2014). In addition, various studies indicate that the time adolescents spend online, their type of school, and grade level are significant risk factors that affect internet addiction (Valkenburg, Schouten and Peter, 2005; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008). However, it should also be said that the relationships between problematic internet use, self-perception and the types of high school adolescents attend have not been examined at great length until now.

### 1.1. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between problematic internet use and the self-perception and personality type of adolescents, as well as demographic characteristics such as gender and the types of high school they attend. In this context, the research questions of this study were defined as follows:

1. Can personality type (extraversion, neuroticism, lie and psychoticism), self-perception (romantic appeal, athletic competence, physical appearance, social acceptance/close friendship, behavioral conduct/school competence and job competence), gender and duration of internet use significantly predict problematic internet use?
2. Can problematic internet use exhibit a statistically significant variation with respect to high school type?

## 2. Method

The study was carried out according to a relational screening model. This model aims to determine the degree of covariation between two or more variables (Karasar, 2005).

### 2.1. Study group

A total of 771 high school students attending high schools in the provincial center of Kars participated to this study. Average student age was 16 (lowest age = 14, highest age = 19). It was determined that 433 (56.2%) of the participants were girls, while 338 (43.8) were boys. The number of students who owned personal computers was 405 (52.5%), while the number of students who did not own a computer was 366 (47.5%). In addition, it was determined that 287 (37.22%) of the students accessed the internet from home, while 190 (24.64%) accessed it from school, 259 (33.59%) accessed it from internet cafés, and 29 (3.76%) accessed it from a friend's home. Only 6 (0.77%) of the students were not able to access the internet.

While the students' average time of internet use varied between 1 h and 78 h per week, the mean time spend on the internet was  $6.67 \pm 8.8$  h per week. Of the study participants, 100 (13%) were attending common high schools, 106 (13.7%) were attending vocational high schools for girls, 103 (13.4%) were attending technical vocational high schools, 118 (15.3%) were attending fine arts high schools, 133 (17.3%) were attending trade vocational schools, 149 (19.3%) were attending Anatolian high schools, and 62 (8%) were attending science high schools. Before administering the study assessment tools, the purpose of the study was briefly explained to the students. The students were then asked to fill in the scales.

### 2.2. Data collection tools

**Personal Information Form:** A personal information form was

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