



## Full Length Article

## Life satisfaction and family functions as-predictors of problematic Internet use in university students



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## ABSTRACT

One goal of this research was to analyze problematic Internet use in university students according to such variables as gender, grade point average, satisfaction with one's department, mother's/father's education level, smoking, alcohol consumption, gambling behavior, relationship between parents, length of Internet use, amount of time spent on the Internet daily, and using the Internet for academic purposes. Another goal was to analyze family functioning and life satisfaction as predictors of problematic Internet use in university students. The study sample comprised 663 university students from Dokuz Eylül University, İzmir. The Problematic Internet Use Scale, Family Evaluation Scale, Life Satisfaction Scale, and a questionnaire requesting demographic information were administered. The results revealed that the family functioning dimensions of problem solving, roles, and behavioral control, as well as gender, age, gambling behavior, perception of the relationship between one's parents, number of years of Internet use, amount of time spent on the Internet daily, and using the Internet for academic purposes explained 48% of the total variance in Internet use. There was also a significant relationship between university students' life satisfaction and total Internet use, rate of Internet overuse, and the social benefits and negative consequences of Internet use.

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## 1. Introduction

There has been increasing use of the Internet in Turkey and globally. The Internet has a significant role in many areas of life and is used as a wide-ranging mass medium. Today, it is accepted as a very important and valuable way of accessing information (Lytras & Ordóñez de Pablos, 2011), which may be due to its accessibility and ease of use, relatively low cost, and ability to facilitate the flow of information across national borders. Of the 79,749,461 people in Turkey, approximately 45% (36,455,000 people) use the Internet (Europe Internet Usage, 2012). Healthy Internet use is defined as the use of the Internet in order to reach a goal in a specific time without any behavioral or intellectual discomfort (Davis, 2001). Problematic Internet use is defined as a multi-dimensional syndrome that may have negative consequences for an individual's social, psychological, and academic/professional life, and which has cognitive and behavioral indications (Caplan, 2005).

Internet use has some advantages, such as being able to access information easily, quickly, and cheaply. However, it also brings certain problems, such as a decline in academic performance and family relations. Indeed, a correlation between problematic

Internet use and family functioning has been demonstrated (Yen, Yen, Chen, Chen, & Ko, 2007). A study on Internet use and the family conducted in 2008 in Turkey, using a sample of 2000 families, found that 79% of families had access to the Internet at home and 11% had two or more computers at home (Kuzu, Odabaşı, Erişti, Kabakçı, & Kurt, 2008). Studies on the demographic variables related to problematic Internet use have also been conducted (Akin & İskender, 2011; Ceyhan, 2008; Toprakçı, 2007; Berber Çelik, & Odacı, 2012; Ceyhan, Ceyhan, & Kurtyılmaz, 2012). Young (1999) developed a questionnaire to identify individuals with Internet addiction and found that family was an environmental stressor that could lead to problematic Internet use.

Family functioning is known to be connected with risky behaviors in young people and has been a focus of many studies (Ceyhan, 2008; Esen & Siyez, 2011; Goldberg, 1996). Many studies have examined the effects of family functioning on individual behavior. Family functioning was first described by Epstein and Westley (Epstein & Westley 1959). Between 1960 and 1970, Epstein and colleagues (Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop, 1983; Epstein, Bishop, & Levin, 1978) developed a model to analyze family functioning, focusing on six dimensions—problem-solving, roles, communication, showing one's emotions, showing necessary interest in family members, and behavioral control—which reflect the basic features

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of family (Epstein et al., 1983). Healthy family functioning improves the relationships and interactions between family members (Kocatürk, 2010). A healthy family is one with a flexible internal structure and functioning, where the members are in constant development, and with healthy communication and dialog between children and parents, unconditional love, cooperation, and solidarity. In addition, it is composed of individuals with internal control characteristics and the family works to solve interpersonal conflicts (Bulut, 1990; Dönmezer, 2000; Foley, 1986; Gordon, 1996; Çakmaklı, 1989). If these characteristics do not exist, it can lead to an unhealthy family. Experiences in the family are basic factors of a child's and young individual's social environment (De'Ath, 1983; Goleman, 1996). Living with and having positive relationships with one's family are protective factors against problematic behaviors (Berkovitz, 1993; Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, 1995; McCarthy & Brack, 1996). Family processes are determinative in an individual's life (Garmiene, Zemaitine, & Zaborskis, 2006). Studies on problematic behaviors have examined the family model (Güvenir, 2005), disciplinary style in the family (Gilmour, 2005), and level of dependence in the family (Nelson, Mitchell, & Yang, 2008).

Research has examined the relationship between family processes and compliance problems with the opposite sex, as well as the relationship between depression and unhealthy family functioning (Türküm, Kızıtaş, Bıyık, & Yemenici, 2005). Previous studies have found that unhealthy family functioning is related to depression (Otlu, 2008). Indeed, one criterion for depression in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed.; American Psychiatric Association., 1994) is negativity in family life (Goldberg, 1996). Thus, family is both a risk factor and a protective factor for problematic behaviors in young people.

Another concept that is possibly related to problematic Internet use in young people is life satisfaction, which is closely related with individuals' subjective well-being. Life satisfaction varies between individuals and is generally considered as being content with one's life. It is defined as the positive emotional responses of individuals (Sung-Mook & Giannakopoulos, 1994). Life satisfaction has been demonstrated to be the cognitive component of subjective well-being (Dorahy et al., 2000). Having more positive experiences than negative experiences affects life satisfaction (Diener, Diener, & Tamir, 2004). Life satisfaction generally involves the entire life of an individual, and includes many dimensions of life rather than a specific situation. Factors that are considered to affect life satisfaction include being content with daily life, finding life meaningful, success in reaching goals, positive personal identity, feeling physically well, economic safety, and social relationships (Keser, 2005).

Positive experiences may lead to an increase in life satisfaction while negative experiences may lead to a decrease. Life satisfaction can also be considered as the dominance of positive feelings in daily relations over negative feelings (Deniz & Yılmaz, 2006; Diener et al., 2004; Veenhoven, 1996). As life satisfaction is multi-dimensional and comprises one's entire life, the relationships between individual characteristics and life satisfaction have been analyzed.

Life satisfaction has been linked to a sense of personal integrity (Çeçen, 2008), sense of family integrity, and self-esteem (Annak, 2005); parental attitudes (Gürsoy, 2009); attitudes toward receiving psychological support (Dilek, 2010); mental exhaustion (Telef, 2011); experience of violence (Kabasakal & Gırlı, 2012); and problem-solving abilities (Kabasakal & Uz-Baş, 2013). In this context, it can be expected that life satisfaction is connected with individual Internet use. Additional possible factors related to problematic Internet use in young people are other problem behaviors (Phillips, Ogeil, & Blaszczynski, 2012; Sung, Won-Le, Mi-Noh, Park, & Ju-Ahn, 2013), grade point average, (Frangos,

Frangos, & Kiohos, 2010; Mythily, Qiu, & Winslow, 2008) and amount of time spent on the Internet (Ko et al., 2007; Milani, Osualdella, & Di Blasio, 2009).

Therefore, there were two main goals of this study. One goal was to analyze problematic Internet use in university students in relation to gender, grade point average, satisfaction with their academic department, mother's/father's education level, smoking, alcohol consumption, gambling behavior, and length of Internet use, duration of Internet use per day, and relationship between parents. Another goal was to study family functioning and life satisfaction as the predictors of problematic Internet use in university students.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research design

This study was designed according to the relational screening model. The relational screening model aims to determine the existence and level of covariance among two or more variables and is a general screening model (Karasar, 2006). The participants were 663 university students (440 female and 223 male) who volunteered to participate in the study from the Buca Education Faculty, 2013–2014 cohort. The ages of the participants ranged between 17 and 23 years ( $M = 20.33$  and  $SD = 1.420$ ). The participants gave informed consent.

### 2.2. Questionnaires

#### 2.2.1. Problematic Internet Use Scale

This Likert-type scale, composed of 33 items, distinguishes between healthy and unhealthy Internet use in university students. It is divided into three dimensions: overuse (6 items), which includes such items as "Because I spend too much time on the Internet my academic success level decreases"; social benefits/social ease (10 items), including such items as "Instead of spending money on social activities I would rather spend money on accessing the Internet"; and negative outcomes of Internet use (17 items), including such items as "When I am on the Internet I may forget to eat" (Ceyhan, Ceyhan, & Gürcan, 2007). The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be .94, and the test-retest reliability coefficient to be .81 (Ceyhan et al., 2007). An internal consistency coefficient of .97 was obtained for the scale in this study.

#### 2.2.2. Family Evaluation Scale

This scale was based on the McMaster Family Functions Model (Bulut, 1990). This scale can distinguish between the structural and organizational features of a family, and healthy and unhealthy interactions between family members (Bulut, 1990). There are seven subscales in this Likert-type scale, which consists of 60 items. The first six subscales of family functioning assess problem areas. These subscales are problem solving, communication, roles, emotional resilience ability, affective involvement, and behavior control. The seventh scale, which concerns general functioning, was added later to the Family Evaluation Scale. The total scores on the scale range from one to four, with scores close to 1 indicating healthy family functioning and a score of 4 indicating the most unhealthy family functioning. According to the developer of this scale, if the score of the Family Evaluation Scale is less than (or equal to) 2, the family functioning can be considered healthy; conversely, if the score is more than 2 (up to or equal to 4), the family functioning can be considered unhealthy (Bulut, 1990). Epstein and Bishop (1983) confirmed the validity of the scale. In another study, the internal consistency coefficient was found to range between

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