Internet addiction among adolescents: the role of self-esteem

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the role of self-esteem on adolescents’ Internet addiction. The sample of the study consisted of 324 adolescents from Trabzon, Turkey. “Internet Addiction Scale” and “Coopersmith Self-Esteem Scale” were used as data collection instruments. Obtained data were analyzed through Pearson-Product-Moment correlation coefficient and multiple linear regression analysis. The findings showed that general self-esteem, social self-esteem, family-home self-esteem and total self-esteem were significantly and negatively correlated with Internet addiction. Furthermore, social self-esteem and family-home self-esteem were found to be significant predictors of Internet addiction. These results were discussed and some conclusions were made.

Keywords: Adolescents, Internet use, self-esteem, Internet addiction.

1. Introduction

One of the most important features of modern society is the growing impact of online communication tools, especially Internet on people (Cüceloğlu, 2007). This impact is also felt on adolescents, no doubt. Lukoff (2004) has identified certain factors that increase adolescents’ tendency to the Internet. These are the desires like to be free, to communicate easily, to create an identity easily and to develop meaningful personal relationships. These and other factors increase adolescents’ Internet use rate day by day. Increased use brings some problems with it. Perhaps, the most important of these is the “Internet Addiction”.

Excessive Internet use is seen in different cultures (Cao & Su, 2007) and it is stated that adolescents group is at highest risk (Mossbarger, 2008; Yen, Yen, Chen, Chen & Ko, 2008). Adolescents’ beliefs and perceptions about themselves reflect in their behavior characteristics when using the Internet. At this point, emerges the importance of self-esteem. Self-esteem briefly means what an individual think about himself. In other words, it’s about how an individual evaluate her/his self concept (Burger, 2006). It is thought that existence of a relationship between self-esteem and Internet addiction is likely. In many studies it has been revealed that adolescents tend to appear different from what they are when expressing themselves in dating sites, social networking sites and gaming sites (Madell & Muncer, 2006; Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arseneault, Simmering, & Orr, 2009; Sheeks & Birchmeier, 2006; Voluse, Körkel & Sobell, 2007). In addition, there has been studies in which the relationship between addiction and self-esteem is revealed (Greenberg, Lewis & Dodd, 1999; Sobell, 2007). In these studies, it is stated that different levels of self-
esteem lead to self-distrust, addicted personality, sense of loss of control and sense of failure. Therefore, it is thought that individuals' self-esteem levels may be a significant determinant of Internet addiction.

1.1. Literature Review

Excessive Internet use is discussed by many researchers with different concepts. “Internet addiction” (Young & Rodgers, 1998), “Internet dependency” (Wang, 2001), “pathological Internet use” (Young, 2004), “problematic Internet use” (Kaltiala-Heino, Lintonen & Rimpela, 2004), “Internet abuse” (Young & Case, 2004), “cyberaddiction” (Chebbi, Kong & Liu, 2001), “obsessive video game playing (Keepers, 1990)” are many of these. Kendal (1998) has defined Internet addiction as a kind of psychological addiction representing the need to be active on the Internet. Besides, Griffiths (2000) has described Internet addiction as a kind of technology addiction and a behavioral addiction similar to a gambling habit. Shapira, Goldsmith, Keck, K hosla, Mcleroy et al. (2003) suggest that problematic Internet use to be conceptualized as an impulse control disorder based on the current experimental data. Davis (2001) has developed a cognitive behavioral model for problematic Internet use. In Turkey, relevant studies exists focusing on the Internet addiction and pathological Internet use (Kayri & Günüç, 2008; Odabaşıoğlu Öztürk, Genç & Pektas, 2007; Oğuz, Zaim, Özel & Saka, 2008; Özcan & Buzlu, 2005; Öztürk, Odabaşıoğlu, Erarslan, Genç & Kalyoncu, 2005) and it is seen that number of these studies is not sufficient.

The association between self-esteem and addiction is not unusual. Various studies exists on this issue and it is concluded that a strong relationship exists between these two variables (Greenberg, Lewis & Dodd, 1999; Miller, 1990; Richter, Brown & Mott, 1991). In fact, the relationship between Internet addiction and self-esteem has been discussed in several studies. In these studies, personality traits, self-esteem and other psychiatric disorders were shown to be associated with Internet addiction (Griffiths, 2000; 2008). Davis (2001) has told about the distal and proximal factors associated with the use of Internet. According to Davis, distal factors associated with the Internet use refer to the underlying psychopathology. These may be depression, social anxiety and other dependencies. Proximal factors refer to the maladaptive cognitions. Negative evaluation of self and the world may be the maladaptive cognitions. Young (1998) has reported that vast majority of Internet addicts has a history of experiencing depression and anxiety. Low self-esteem in another part has also been reported. In some other studies, self-esteem has emerged a factor associated with Internet use (Jackson, Eye, Fitzgerald & Zhao, 2010) and problematic Internet use (Kim & Davis, 2009). In addition the research on self-esteem and the use of Internet, there has been studies examining adolescents’ use of some social networking sites and its association with their self-esteem. In these studies, it is seen that adolescents with low self-esteem tend to spend more time in social networking sites than those with higher self-esteem (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007; Steinfield, Ellison & Lampe, 2008).

In this study, self-esteem was examined in determining Internet addiction among Turkish adolescents. It is thought that the results of the study will contribute significantly to personality-related research on Internet addiction and preventive studies on adolescents.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants and Procedure

324 students participated in this study. All of the participants are high school seniors and their age range is between 16 and 18 (M= 16.85). Scores taken from the Internet addiction scale between 50 and 81 indicate the presence of internet addiction symptoms. Therefore, students who get 50 points and above were identified. 96 students showed addiction symptoms and statistical analysis were performed with data obtained from these 96 students. Of these participants, 54 (56%) were male and 42 (44%) were female. All of the participants taught in Trabzon in the second semester of the 2009-2010 training year. Measures were administrated in classrooms. Prior to administration of scales, purposes of the study were explained to all participants.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. The Internet Addiction Scale (IAS)

The Internet Addiction Scale (IAS) is a revised version of “Internet Addiction Diagnostic Questionnaire” which devised by Young (1996). Scale consisting of 20 items was translated into Turkish by Bayraktar (2001). The 20
items of the IAS are calibrated scores ranging from 1 to 5 (given a total score ranging from 20 to 100), with higher scores reflecting a greater tendency toward addiction. Three types of Internet user groups were identified, internet addicts, showing limited symptoms and showing no symptoms, whose scores were higher than 80, between 50-79 and below 50. The internal consistency (Cronbach alpha coefficient) of the Turkish IAS is .90.

2.2.2. Coopersmith Self-Esteem Scale (CSEC)

This scale has two different forms; a long form composed of 58 items and a short form composed of 25 items. In this study, the long form of 58 items has been used. The original scale translated into Turkish by Pişkin (1996). With it, it is possible to obtain scores for 5 subscales. These are: general self-esteem, school and academic self-esteem, family and home self-esteem, and false items. The sum of the scores obtained from the subscales of the inventory, except for the false items; indicate the total self-esteem of the scale. Total score has been taken into account in the reliability and validity calculations of the scale. In different groups, KR-21 scores have been calculated as between .75 and .83. The correlation coefficient between the applications conducted on 51 students with a two-week interval for the repetition reliability of the test has been found as .70.

2.3 Data Analysis

Obtained data analyzed through SPSS 15.0 software. Firstly, relationship between adolescents’ self-esteem dimensions and Internet addiction investigated through Pearson-Product-Moment correlation coefficient. Then, the predicting role of self-esteem dimensions on Internet addiction investigated through multiple linear regression analysis.

3. Findings

3.1. The Relationship Between Adolescents’ Self-Esteem Dimensions and Internet Addiction.

Data about the relationship between self-esteem dimensions and Internet addiction are presented in Table one below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. General Self-Esteem</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.85**</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social Self-Esteem</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
<td>-.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Home-Family Self-Esteem</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
<td>-.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. School-Academic Self-Esteem</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Total Self-Esteem</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Internet Addiction</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>65.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>40.81</td>
<td>11.93</td>
<td>12.25</td>
<td>12.08</td>
<td>90.17</td>
<td>65.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sd</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>14.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** p<0.01

As can be seen from the Table one, Internet addiction was significantly and negatively correlated with general self-esteem (r= -.29, p<.01), social self-esteem (r= -.24, p<.01), home-family self-esteem (r= -.23, p<.01) and total self-esteem (r= -.31, p<.01). School-academic self-esteem was not found as correlated with Internet addiction (r= .01). The findings indicate that adolescents’ who score lower on general self-esteem, social self-esteem and school-academic self-esteem and total self-esteem have higher Internet addiction scores.

3.2. The Role Of Self-Esteem Dimensions In Predicting Internet Addiction

Data about the role of self-esteem dimensions in predicting Internet addiction are presented in Table 2 below:
Table 2: Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Internet Addiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>156.70</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Self-Esteem</td>
<td>-1.29</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>-.25</td>
<td>-1.68</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Self-Esteem</td>
<td>-2.93</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-2.31</td>
<td>.02*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-Family Self-Esteem</td>
<td>-2.53</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-2.13</td>
<td>.03*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Self-Esteem</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.01

Results revealed that the multiple regression coefficient was significant (R= .37, p<.05) for the model. In other words, the linear combination of predictor variables was significantly related to the Internet addiction scores of adolescents. (F(4,92)= 6.69 , p<.05). Combination of four variables explained % 12 of the total variance in Internet addiction scores (R² = .14, ΔR² = 12). The unique contributions of social self-esteem and home-family self-esteem to model were significant but the other predictor variables’ not. In other words, social self-esteem and home-family self-esteem were found to be significant predictors of Internet addiction among adolescents.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study revealed that general self-esteem, social self-esteem, home-family self-esteem and total self-esteem were significantly and negatively correlated with Internet addiction among adolescents. Furthermore, social self-esteem and home-family self-esteem were found to be significant predictors of Internet addiction.

In the literature, it can be seen that many studies has been examined the association between self-esteem and pathological Internet use (Armstrong, Phillips & Salling, 2000; Griffiths & Banyard, 2005; Kim & Davis, 2009 Niemz). Based on the results of these studies, we can conclude that a negative relationship exists between these two variables. Griffith’s (2000) studies provide important findings in disclosing this relationship. He states that the participants’ use of Internet is highly associated with its perception as a coping style and way of a compensation of some deficiencies such as low self-esteem. According to him, it allows them to feel better, because it is an alternative for which they take different personality and social identity. In other words, they highly satisfy themselves in this way. As can be seen, when individuals evaluate themselves in a negative way, they may perceive the Internet as a way for the compensation of these negations and increasing internet use may turn into a dependent relationship.

Adolescents are regarded as the best candidates for being Internet addicts (Mossbarger, 2008; Yen at al., 2007). Therefore, specific issues associated with their usage of Internet must be addressed. Padwa and Cunningham (2010) states that, the most common form of Internet addiction among young people is online gaming addiction. These games offer young people the opportunity to express themselves in a way that they could never be in real life and the pleasure they obtained from this kind of interaction makes it turn into an addictive use. Furthermore, such games provide never-ending goals and tasks to individuals. When they become successful in these games, they perceive an increased sense of power and a higher status. In other words, Internet use may emerge as a way in which individuals make up perceived deficiencies and have a positive evaluation of self for a temporary time.

Another result of this study is emergence of social self-esteem and family-home self-esteem as significant predictors of Internet addiction. At this point, it is necessary to point out the family’s role on their children’s self-esteem and its possible relationship with Internet addiction. Family support, care and participation is regarded as having strong effects on adolescents’ evaluations of themselves. Provided autonomy by family importantly contributes to adolescents’ self-esteem and self-efficacy beliefs. Purification by family pressure provides adolescents an opportunity to explore the world and to try out development-supporting activities. Also this gives adolescent the idea that her/his family trusts him and accepts him a responsible person (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986). In this sense it would not be a surprise to expect adolescents, whose experiences were not supported and paid attention in the family environment, and who are restricted to freedom, hence could not hold a responsibility in personal lives, to direct themselves into a virtual environment where they feel unlimitedly free.
In our study, another predictor of Internet addiction was found as social self-esteem. Given the importance of social relationships during adolescence, it seems inevitable that the self-esteem levels of adolescents affected by the qualities of peer relationships. Craig (1995) states that, an individual’s negative self-evaluation in peer relationships may cause the dependent behaviors in order to avoid these stressful relationships (As cited in Armstrong et al., 2000). Padwa and Cunningham (2010) refer to social factors associated with Internet addiction. According to them, online games with multi-player attract young people because these games are simulation of social communication in real life. In addition, a degree of anonymity especially attracts individuals who may be anxious in social situations.

In relevant literature, it is not reached a consensus whether self-esteem is a cause or a result of Internet addiction (Niemz at al., 2005; Shaw & Gant, 2002). In this study, self-esteem is discussed as an antecedent to Internet addiction. As mentioned above, self-esteem is an important determinant of individuals’ behaviors and activities. Some of these activities support development of an individual; on the other hand some of them are harmful for personal development. Internet addiction is one of them and with a sense of diminishing self-control, it may cause a further reduction in self-esteem. The general inference we can make is that self-esteem has an influential role on adolescents’ development. Thus, adolescents need to gain the belief that they are worthy. An emphatic understanding of their experiences and accepting them as they are may be the first step taken by parents, educators and counselors. Within the school environment, presenting a large number of social and sporting opportunities for adolescents to test and develop their abilities may also be very helpful. As a final recommendation, it is thought that counselors should organize informative and preventive group activities about the proper use of Internet and the results of excessive use.

In conclusion, this study is an effort to examine whether self-esteem is determinant on Internet addiction. Based on the results of this study, experimental studies aimed at promoting self-esteem on adolescent addicts would be done.

References


