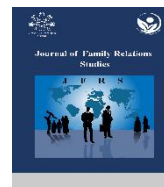




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### Research Paper

## Predicting internet addiction in teenagers according to the parenting styles, the family emotional atmosphere, and marital conflict between parents



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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The aim of this study was to predict Internet addiction in teenagers based on parenting styles, family emotional atmosphere, and marital conflict of parents.

**Methods:** The research method was descriptive-correlational. The statistical population of the present study included all second-year high school students in public high schools in the city of Ardabil during the academic year of 2021-2022. 375 students were selected by a multi-stage cluster sampling method. Data were collected using the Internet Addiction Questionnaire (2010), Parenting Styles Questionnaire (2002), Affective Family Atmosphere Questionnaire (2013), and Marital Conflict Scale (1986). Data analysis was done using SPSS- 25 software, the Pearson correlation coefficient, and multiple regression.

**Results:** The results showed that there is a negative and meaningful relationship between Internet addiction, authoritative and autocratic parenting styles, and the emotional atmosphere of the family ( $P < 0.05$ ). Also, there is a positive and significant relationship between marital conflict, neglectful parenting style, and internet addiction ( $P < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** The results showed that parenting styles, family emotional atmosphere, and marital conflict of parents play an important role in predicting teenagers' internet addiction. Therefore, it is recommended that psychologists and school counselors hold workshops with the aim of reducing and preventing internet addiction among teenagers.

### 1. Introduction

Adolescence is a period of essential variations in the social, cognitive, and emotional fields (Tatli & Ergin, 2022) that are affected by multiple factors. Today, the novel social factors, including digital media, affect the health of teenagers. One of the challenges that humans, especially teenagers, face is how to use new technologies. Today, real life is intertwined with the virtual world, especially the internet; however, despite all its uses, internet addiction is one of the most important negative

and destructive effects of the virtual world (Safari et al, 2021). Internet addiction is like drug addiction and other addictions (Amini & Hassanzadeh, 2021). It has a negative effect not only on mental and physical growth but also on education, life, interpersonal relationships, and different aspects of the human character (Li, 2023). Internet addiction has become a social problem, and it is becoming increasingly popular (Cheng & Liu, 2020). Internet addiction has a broad concept, including addiction

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to internet games and other forms of internet use. (Okan et al., 2022). Various explanations have been provided for the etiology of internet addiction. Family factors such as the construction of the family, the method of parents' interaction with their children, and the expectations of parents are related to internet addiction in teenagers (Zandi Payam et al, 2019). The parenting method is one of the family factors that may play a role in children's addiction to the internet (Tamanaei Far & Khanshan, 2023). The method of parenting is the sum of the behaviors and methods that affect the growth of children separately or when interacting with each other (Brummer et al., 2021). Parenting styles have two dimensions: first, parents' demands, and second, parents' responses. Based on these two dimensions, three types of parenting styles can be distinguished: Authoritative parenting style, in which both parents' demands from their children and their responsiveness to children's needs are high; authoritarian parenting style, in which the demand is high but the response level is low; and permissive parenting style in which the parents' demand is low (Mikaeili & Salmani, 2021), but their responsiveness is high introduced three methods of parenting: autocratic style, authoritarian style, and neglectful style (Jahanbakshi et al, 2024; Quoted from Baumrind, 1991). Researchers found that the inefficient method of parenting correlates with the deviant behavior of children (Mosier, 2022). For example, the study of Karababa (2020) demonstrated that internet addiction has a negative correlation with kindness, acceptance, positive reinforcement, adequate control, and supervision by parents. The study of Shivam et al (2021) showed that the optimal level of supervision and control of parents is a predictor of significant negative internet addiction. The results of Tamanaei Far & Khanshan (2023). Studies also indicated that there is a significant relationship between the method of parenting and internet addiction in teenagers.

The emotional atmosphere of the family is another factor that plays an effective role in internet addiction. The emotional atmosphere is defined as the relationship and emotional interactions, such as expressing feelings and interests, between members of a family, and also the way they interact with each other (Abooei et al., 2023). The relationship and behavior of parents with their children could have a strong effect on forming the cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of children's behavior (Enfeal et al., 2021). Like other addictions, the role of good relationships in the family is considered in internet addiction (Esrafil & Basharpour, 2019). Authoritarianism, humiliation, and rejection of children are factors that encourage the feeling of failure. Obviously, aggression and irrational acts outside the tolerance of children cause an incidence of impulse and aggressive and revengeful behaviors, reducing the ability and capacity to dominate

over destructive and negative emotions, thoughts, self-expression, and recognition of their own and others' feelings (Mikaeili et al., 2025).

Besides the family emotional atmosphere, marital conflict between parents can play a role in internet addiction. Marital conflict is caused by inconsistency between the needs of husband and wife and the way to satisfy their needs, self-centered, their different demands, behavioral methods, and irresponsible behaviors in the marital relationship (Otero et al., 2020). Marital conflict not only decreases the adolescent's efficiency but also results in an unhealthy self-concept. This issue pushes teenagers' tendency toward risky behaviors such as addiction (Romm & Metzger, 2018). Zarei (2022) in his study showed that there is a significant relationship between marital conflict of parents and teenagers' addiction. Also, the study of Ko et al. (2015) demonstrated that marital conflict is the most powerful predictor of internet addiction.

Internet addiction can have an important effect on the mental and social growth of teenagers. Therefore, a better conception of this issue and its effective factors is especially important. Until today, most of the studies focused on the consequences of internet addiction, but there is no study about the role of effective factors on internet addiction in teenagers. With regard to the above-mentioned issues and by considering the increasingly improper use of the internet by teenagers as well as the lack of studies about the causes of internet addiction in teenagers, the present study has been conducted with the aim of predicting internet addiction in teenagers based on parenting methods, emotional atmosphere of the family, and marital conflict of parents.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The method of the present study was descriptive-correlational. The statistical population of this study included all second-year high school students of the public high school in the city of Ardabil in the academic year of 2021-2022. 420 subjects were selected by the multi-stage cluster sampling method by considering the Morgan table. Due to the missed subjects of the test, 375 students were considered enough for this study. Therefore, 169 boys and 206 girls were selected as the sample size from 10 high schools (including 5 boys' high schools and 5 girls' high schools). In general, two classes, each with 20 students, were selected from every 10 high schools. All subjects participated in the study voluntarily due to ethical considerations. The students could leave the study at any stage of the test. Also, they were assured that their information would be safe. The inclusion criteria in this research included being a student in a secondary high school, having an addiction to the Internet, and consenting to participate in the research. The exclusion criteria include

the subject's unwillingness to continue research and incomplete answers to the questionnaire.

The considered high schools were selected after obtaining the necessary permits. First, the purposes of the study have been described to the principals of the high schools. After their agreement, the classes were selected, and the questionnaires were given to the students. The researcher gave a brief description of the aims of the study and the way of responding to the questionnaire to the students and asked them to fill out the questionnaire. If students had any questions, the researcher guided them. The questionnaires of parents were given to them by their children, and they filled out the questionnaire in their home and then returned it. The data was analyzed with SPSS-27.

#### Instruments

**Internet addiction questionnaire (IAQ):** The IAQ was developed by Yang (1998). This questionnaire has 20 questions as a five-point Likert response scale (rarely:1, sometimes:2, often:3, most of the time: 4, and always: 5). The total score of the questionnaire is obtained by summing the scores that were responded to by the students. The obtained score was the total score of the questionnaire, and also its range was considered from 20 to 100. A higher score showed more internet addiction. Yang (1998) estimated the internal validity of the questionnaire to be equal to 0.92. By the method of retest, he also reported that the validity of the questionnaire was significant. Widianto & Mac Muran (2004) evaluated and confirmed the validity of this questionnaire. By using Cronbach's alpha, they estimated the reliability of the questionnaire as 0.85.

**Parenting Styles Questionnaire (PSQ):** The initial form of this questionnaire has 30 items. It was designed and made by Baumrind (1991). This questionnaire measures the parenting styles via three factors, including the neglectful parenting style (questions 1, 6, 10, 13, 14, 17, 19, 21, 24, 28). Authoritarian style (questions 2, 3, 7, 9, 12, 16, 25, 26, 29), and autocratic style (questions 11, 15, 20, 22, 23, 27, 30). This questionnaire was answered on a 5-point Likert scale (from completely disagree= 0 to completely agree= 5). The score of each style was obtained by summing the score of each question of each style divided by the number of questions in each style. By the method of retest, Baumrind (1991) reported the reliability of this questionnaire for neglectful style, authoritative style, and autocratic style as 0.81, 0.86, and 0.78, respectively. Also, he reported the internal validity of the questionnaire by using Cronbach's alpha for neglectful style, authoritative style, and autocratic style as 0.75, 0.85, and 0.82, respectively (Amirpour et al., 2020).

**Family Emotional Atmosphere Questionnaire (FEAQ):** This questionnaire was designed by Nodargah (1994, quoted by Zandi Payam et al., 2016) to measure the

emotional atmosphere of the family. FEAQ consists of 35 items. The responders answered this questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale (from never: 0 to too much: 4). The lower score indicated a favorable emotional atmosphere, and the higher score showed a non-favorable one. The reliability of this questionnaire was reported to be 0.95 using Cronbach's alpha in the psychometric sample, and the content validity of this scale was also investigated, and according to the confirmation of the internal validity of the questions by experts, it can be considered as one of the evidence of construct validity (Zandipayam et al, 2016)

#### Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale:

The Child's Perceptions of Parental Conflict scale was developed by Grych et al, (1992). This scale is based on the context-based cognitive framework model, to measure marital conflict from children's reports, that is, the characteristics of the conflict or the dimensions of the parents' conflict from the child's point of view (including scales of repetition, intensity, problem solving, and content of the conflict) and the child's reaction. Conflict or interpretation of conflict (including feeling of threat, coping effectiveness, and self-blame) is designed for ages 10 and older. The theoretical range of its scores is from 0 to 102. A higher score indicates more negative conflict characteristics (more and more intense conflict, weaker conflict resolution, and more connection of the content of the conflict with issues related to the child), more self-blame and feeling of threat, and less effective coping. Grich et al. (1992) found the reliability of this scale to be 0.70, 0.68, and 0.76 with the osmotic-retest method during two weeks on a small sample of children (44 people) and with Cronbach's alpha method of 0.61. They reported 0 to 0.83. In the research of Muora et al. (2010), the reliability of this scale was obtained by the Cronbach's alpha method for the entire scale of 0.86. In Iran, the reliability of this scale using Cronbach's alpha method has been obtained as 0.77, 0.61, and 0.84, respectively (Gharehbaghy & Vafaie, 2010).

### 3. Results

In the present study, there were 375 participants, including 169 boys (45.1%) and 206 girls (54.9%). The mean and standard deviation of the age of teenagers were 16.25 (1.54), and the mean and standard deviation of the age of their parents were 47.34 (7.21).

As Table 1 demonstrates, the means of the variables of neglectful parenting style, authoritarian parenting style, and autocratic parenting style are 25.84, 31.08, and 19.64. The means of the variables of internet addiction, family emotional atmosphere, and marital conflict of parents are 49.42, 66.67, and 73.61, respectively. To ensure the assumptions of the Pearson correlation coefficient, the

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to establish the normality of the distribution of scores on the study's

variables. The results of the test for the distribution of the scores were given in Table 2.

**Table 1.** Mean and standard deviation of the variables of the study

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
The neglectful parenting style	25.84	4.93
Authoritarian parenting style	31.08	3.68
Autocratic parenting style	19.64	5.25
Internet addiction	49.42	15.12
The emotional atmosphere of the family	66.67	23.26
Marital conflict of parents	73.61	12.66

As Table 2 indicates, the statistical test is  $\geq 0.05$  for all studied variables, the data distribution is normal, and

using the parametric test is allowed.

**Table 2.** The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the variables of the study

Variable	The statistical amount	Meaningfully level
The neglectful parenting style	1.183	0.122
Authoritarian parenting style	1.314	0.063
Autocratic parenting style	1.320	0.061
Internet addiction	1.289	0.072
The emotional atmosphere of the family	1.514	0.589
Marital conflict of parents	1.985	0.443

As Table 3 demonstrates, the significance level is less than 0.05 for all components. Therefore, there is a significant direct correlation between neglectful parenting style and internet addiction of teenagers ( $r = -0.66$ ). Also, there is a significant inverse correlation between authoritarian parenting style ( $r = -0.32$ ) and

autocratic one ( $r = -0.71$ ) with internet addiction of teenagers. There is a relationship between the emotional atmosphere of the family and the internet addiction of teenagers ( $r = -0.33$ ). In addition, there is a correlation between marital conflict of parents and internet addiction of teenagers ( $r = -0.71$ ).

**Table 3.** The correlation coefficient between variables of parenting styles, emotional atmosphere of family, marital conflict, and internet addiction of teenagers

Variable	Sig	The amount of r
The neglectful parenting style	0.000	0.66
Authoritarian parenting style	0.000	-0.32
Autocratic parenting style	0.000	-0.71
The emotional atmosphere of the family	0.007	-0.33
Marital conflict of parents	0.000	0.71

As Table 4 showed, 0.07 variance of internet addiction of teenagers can be predicted by parenting styles,

emotional atmosphere of family, and marital conflict of parents.

**Table 4.** The summary of the regression analysis model for predicting the internet addiction of teenagers

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Modified R <sup>2</sup>	Standard deviation
1	0.27	0.07	0.65	14.63

As Table 5 indicates, the variables of emotional atmosphere, marital conflict, and parenting styles can

meaningfully predict the internet addiction of teenagers.

**Table 5.** The results of the regression analysis of internet addiction in teenagers based on the parenting styles, emotional atmosphere of the family, and marital conflict of parents

Model	Standard regression coefficient		Nonstandard regression coefficient		T	Sig
	B	Standard deviation	Beta (the amount of effect)			
Fixed value	88.01	10.19			8.63	0.001
emotional atmosphere	0.07	0.03	-0.11		-2.25	0.025
Marital conflict	-0.20	0.06	-0.17		-3.41	0.001
Neglectful style	-0.27	0.15	-0.08		-1.73	0.014
Authoritarian style	-0.17	0.15	-0.061		-1.11	0.028
Autocratic style	-0.57	0.22	-0.14		-2.57	0.011



#### 4. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of the present study was to predict internet addiction in teenagers according to parenting styles, emotional atmosphere of the family, and marital conflict of parents. The results indicated that there is a significant correlation between the different aspects of parenting styles and internet addiction in teenagers. This finding was consistent with the results of the studies of [Javadi et al. \(2023\)](#), [Karaer & Akdemir \(2019\)](#), [Kargar Shoraki \(2018\)](#), [Cheng et al. \(2015\)](#), and [Karababa \(2020\)](#).

This finding showed that parenting styles are the method of interaction between parents and their children. The interaction based on conversation, along with proper control, logical limitations, and intimacy, which are the characteristics of democratic parents, results in more self-control, more self-esteem, and fewer behavioral problems in children. These features help children behave rationally with a new phenomenon such as the internet ([Crosser, 2005](#)). [Chou et al. \(2016\)](#) in their study indicated that there is a significant negative relationship between authoritative parenting styles and the tendency of teenagers toward the internet. Also, negligent parents do not have any supervision on the activity of children due to a lack of rules and regulations in the family, so they allow their children use the internet unlimitedly. In spite of having intimacy with the children, these parents impose few limitations on them, so the children do not obey their parents ([Woolfolk, 2010](#)). They are not strict parents, and they permit children decide for themselves ([Robbins, 2012](#)). In the same way, the results of studies demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between neglectful parenting styles and compulsory use of the internet. Also, [Li et al \(2014\)](#) in their study showed that the neglectful parenting style has a significant impact on the tendency of teenagers toward internet addiction. This behavior makes the attitude of teenagers more favorable toward the internet and results in behavioral and mental problems in them.

The other finding of this study indicated that there is a significant relationship between the emotional atmosphere of the family and internet addiction. It means that a more inappropriate emotional atmosphere in the family results in higher internet addiction. This finding is consistent with the results of the studies of [Pooragha Rodbardeh et al. \(2022\)](#), [Esrafil & Basharpour \(2019\)](#), [Faltýnková et al. \(2020\)](#), [Jamshidian et al. \(2021\)](#).

According to the ecological systematic theory, it can be explained that the tendency toward addictive behavior is induced whenever there is a weak bond between children and their family ([Yang et al., 2020](#)). Indeed, as the family plays a vital role in the physical, social, and emotional health of an individual, what happens in the family can be an important factor in producing flexibility and reducing

the risks related to unfavorable conditions in different environments. So it reduces the tendency toward addiction behaviors, including internet addiction ([Schneider et al., 2017](#)). Weak emotional relationship between members of a family, indifference, or lack of proper supervision of parents on their children, as well as family conflict, are the factors that can affect the tendency of children to develop internet addiction ([Zeraatherfeh & Khezrimoghaddam, 2017](#)). Trauma in the family, lack of intimacy, lack of support from parents, and lack of common enjoyable activities between members of the family result in teenagers being inclined toward other people, such as their friends and virtual groups, for obtaining peace of mind and intimate communication. So, this behavior results in an addictive behavior ([Pooragha Rodbardeh et al., 2022](#)).

In addition, this study showed that there is a significant relationship between the marital conflict of parents and internet addiction in teenagers. This finding is consistent with the results of the studies of [Ko et al. \(2015\)](#), [Basharpour et al \(2020\)](#), [Wu et al \(2016\)](#), and [Yang et al \(2016\)](#).

It can be explained that marital conflict as an important factor in the family may be a stressful factor for problematic behavior of children. Especially, the experimental studies have shown that the marital conflict of family can affect internet addiction of teenagers. For example, several studies indicated that the marital conflict can predict the signs of the addictive behavior to internet ([De Leo & Wulfert, 2013](#)). Also, the students who experience the more conflict between parents so they have less support. If parents have frequent and severe conflict with each other, therefore they may not be able to provide proper care and supervision to their children ([Masarik & Conger, 2017](#)). Inappropriate atmosphere in the family can decrease the sense of security in the teenagers and also it significantly increases the risk of psychological and behavioral problems. The Bowen family system's theory considers family as a fundamental-emotional unit. When parents have conflict with each other, the stability of this system is disturbed. Since children perceive the instability of this system due to marital conflict of parents, so they do more problematic behavior.

To escape from the problems, the students who experience conflict in their home immerse themselves in the world of the internet. [Ko et al. \(2015\)](#) in their study demonstrated that the marital conflict of parents is the strongest predictor for internet addiction. [Wu et al. \(2016\)](#) showed that the marital conflict of parents has direct effect on the internet addiction and this is mediated by anxiety and depression. ([Gao et al., 2018](#)). Therefore, marital conflict of parents as a functional aspect of family is one of the variables that can be related to internet addiction in teenagers. The studies

indicated that the teenagers who are addicted to the internet have less satisfaction from their family than non-addicted one. These teenagers feel that their parents do not care about them and there is more conflict between their parents (Yen et al, 2007).

The present study also has some limitations such as self-reporting that increases the possibility of bias. This study was conducted on the students of Ardabil, so caution should be considered in generalizing the results. To achieve better results, it is suggested to use more valid measurement method in the future studies. Also, the study should be carried out in the other geographical areas. With consider to the results of the study and the role and importance of the effect of the family components on internet addiction of teenagers, it is suggested that the schools hold the workshops about reducing the tendency toward using the internet. The main aim of these workshops should be providing the educational package for improving the quality of the relationship between parents and their children. For providing the mental health of students in the home and school, the parents should be educated the correct method of parenting. Therefore, we will not see the inconsistent behavior such as excessive use of internet and virtual world by students.

## 5. Ethical Considerations

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

All ethical principles were taken into account in this article. Participants were informed about the research's purpose and its implementation stages. They were also assured of the confidentiality of their information and had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. Additionally, the research results would be made available to them upon request.

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### Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the research and preparation of the article.

### Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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