



Research Article

Spirituality-Integrated Narrative Group Therapy for Adolescent Internet Addiction

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Abstract

This research aims to examine the effect of spiritually oriented narrative therapy-based group counseling on adolescents' internet addiction. The study used a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group. Participants comprised ten high school students ($x_m=14.5$; $x_r=14-15$; $x_m=4$; $x_f=6$). The experimental and control group consists of 20 adolescents in total. "Internet Addiction Scale" and "Social Media Addiction Scale for Adolescents" were data collection tools. The 8-session program, each consisting of 90 minutes, was applied to the experimental group. The specified scales were applied before and after the sessions were held. Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon Paired Pairs Signed Ordinal Numbers Test were used to analyze the data. There was no difference between the experimental and control groups in the first measurements made before the intervention. As a result of the analyses made to examine the intra-group change after the intervention showed a significant adverse change in the experimental group's internet and social media addiction levels. At the same time, there was no change in the control group. Finally, when the difference between the groups after the intervention was examined, it was seen that there was no significant difference between the groups. These findings showed that the intervention reduced Internet and social media addiction.

Keywords:

Narrative therapy • spirituality • group therapy • internet addiction • adolescent

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Today, the internet has become a medium where millions spend most of their lives (Van Schalkwyk et al., 2020). Internet addiction is defined as prolonged and excessive use of the internet beyond planned limits, withdrawal symptoms such as restlessness, aggression, and anger when access is denied, and impairment of personal and social relationships (Griffiths, 1996; Young, 2004). Despite the social and psychological problems associated with internet addiction, such as restrictions on social life, sleep problems, family communication problems, and difficulty fulfilling responsibilities, individuals often find it difficult to disconnect from the internet, computer, or phone (Shapira et al., 2003). Negative affective processes such as restlessness, anger, and aggression are often encountered when reducing internet addiction (Beard & Wolf, 2001). People with internet addiction have also been observed to engage in lying behavior with those around them due to their desire to be online all the time (Young, 2004). Internet use is also seen as a way of avoiding an individual's problems and boredom (Tao et al., 2010).

Various therapeutic approaches have been suggested to overcome internet addiction, including psychoanalysis-based (Dodes & Dodes, 2017), cognitive-behavioral therapy-based (Bong et al., 2021; Szasz-Janocha et al., 2021), Adlerian-based therapy (Tan, 2019), positive psychology-based (Krentzman et al., 2022), logotherapy-based (Liu et al., 2021), and humanistic psychology-based approaches (Clarke & Scholl, 2022; Re et al., 2019).

Narrative therapy is client-centered and encourages us to produce alternative stories that reflect our historical and cultural ties (Madigan, 2016; Russell & Carey, 2020). According to narrative therapy, reality is phenomenological and is structured by elements such as language and social interaction (Payne, 2006). A person creates their story through their family, social environment, language, culture, history, and religion (Morgan, 2000). These interactions are so strong that after a certain amount of time, they become the person's truth and dominant story (Corey, 2005; Karairmak & Bugay, 2010). One's life becomes surrounded by the "problem" and problem-related experiences (White & Epston, 2004). There are many feelings, thoughts, and behaviors in the life of a person with a problem, but the problem suppresses other experiences (Monk, 2005). Therefore, instead of living their own story, the person has to live the story of the problem and the story that others have written for them. Apart from the ones imposed on the person, they also obtained a life story from their own experiences. At this point, narrative therapy aims to eliminate the person's dominant problematic story and create an alternative life story (Morgan, 2000). In this way, narrative therapy puts clients' stories at the center and helps them create well-founded alternative stories (Sween, 2000). While providing this assistance, narrative therapy takes into account the expectations, responsibilities, and experiences of the person in life (Russell & Carey, 2020). There are specific techniques that narrative therapy uses

to achieve its purpose. The foremost of these is “externalization” (Morgan, 2000). The purpose of externalization is to separate the person from the problem because when people identify the problem with themselves, they become part of it (White & Epston, 1990). However, when the problem is externalized, it is seen that it arises from the situation rather than from the personality (Payne, 2006). Narrative therapy, which has a problem-solving approach without discussing the problem, also considers the periods when there is no problem. The therapist approaches events entirely from the client’s perspective, and the client is in the driver’s seat (White & Epston, 2004). After uncovering the situations in people’s lives that are hidden and where there is no over-covering problem, an alternative story is created except for the dominant story, called “rewriting” (White, 2007). This technique reinforces alternative stories, and clients can look at themselves from the outside. In this way, individuals make suggestions about the future (White, 2011). In narrative therapy, the therapist is never in the role of the “expert,” and the client is the expert (Payne, 2006). For this reason, the therapist only accompanies the client to rewrite their story (Madigan, 2016). “Re-membrance” techniques are also used to contribute to the rewritten stories (Carey & Russell, 2003). This technique can involve an individual or anything significant to the person, animate or inanimate. Revealing these helps shape the identity of the person (Russell & Carey, 2003). For narrative therapy, spirituality is a phenomenon that shapes us. According to White (2000), the founder of narrative therapy, spirituality has three aspects: immanent, ascendant, and immanent-ascendant. Ascendant spirituality is a high degree of spirituality independent of everyday life, while immanent spirituality reflects one’s true essence. Transcendent-immanent spirituality combines the two, where spirituality is greater than itself and related to itself (White, 2000). Spirituality integrates with one’s story, and the stories of the prophets offer a different perspective and support the solution to problems so that the person can recognize their belief and identity (Özcan, 2005). It helps them discover and determine their purpose (Kirsh, 1996). In narrative therapy, people can choose a sacred power for themselves, who is not alive but defines them and thickens their story in re-membership studies (Truter & Kodze, 2005). Thanks to thickening, which means an increase in loyalty to the rewritten story, the relationship between the person and the story becomes more robust. It adds richness to the new story (Morgan, 2000).

There are three basic techniques in Spiritually Oriented Narrative Therapy: asking spiritual questions, using stories with spiritual content, and creating an object with spiritual meaning (Sevgi-Yalın, 2017). The first technique aims to discover the client’s goals and reveal the positive aspects of their spirituality in their alternative stories (McWeigh, 2016). The second aims to identify spiritual stories with their experiences and give hope for the future (Epston & White, 1992; Coyle, 2010). The last technique aims to create an alternative story by externalizing the client’s story and revealing the hidden stories. For this, the person has to choose a theme, choose a spiritual object

related to it, and use it in their own story (Bermudez & Bermudez, 2000). Some studies reveal the therapeutic effect of spirituality in the fight against addiction (Bliss, 2015; Cleary & Donohue, 2018; Dossett, 2013; Dossi et al., 2022).

The study aims to enable adolescents with internet addiction to position themselves outside the problem, discover alternative stories, and rewrite the situation by reducing their reliance on the internet. In doing so, it aimed to consolidate alternative stories using spiritual techniques. When the literature is examined, it is seen that while there are many studies with adolescents on internet addiction (Bickham, 2021; Cacioppo et al., 2019; Evli & Şimşek, 2022; Huang et al., 2021; Jin Jeong et al., 2020; Rakhmawati et al., 2021), there are no spiritually oriented narrative-based group studies. For this reason, a group counseling process was planned to reduce the internet addiction levels of adolescents by including their spiritual orientation in the study. In this direction, the study seeks to answer the question, “Does the group counseling process based on narrative therapy integrated with spirituality reduce adolescents’ internet and social media addiction?”

Method

Research model

This study will be conducted using a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group to investigate the effectiveness of spiritually-oriented, narrative-based group counseling in reducing internet addiction. In this design, participants in the experimental group will be subjected to experimental processing, while participants in the control group will not be subjected to experimental processing. The researcher will statistically examine whether there is a similarity between the pretest-posttest scores of the experimental and control groups (Creswell, 2012). The independent variable is group counseling practice, and the dependent variables are internet addiction and social media addiction.

Participants

The study was conducted in 2021 in a counseling center located in Manisa. The Young Internet Addiction Scale and the Social Media Addiction Scale for Adolescents were administered to 67 students to form the experimental and control groups. Snowball and criterion sampling types were used when forming the study group. The criteria for selection were getting a high score on the scales and being a high school student. 20 students were selected according to these criteria, and experimental and control groups of 10 each were formed, taking care not to differentiate the pre-test scores of the 20 students. The experimental group comprised 6 girls and 4 boys of 10 people ($X_{\text{range}}= 14-16$, $X_{\text{mean}}=14.9$). The control group consisted of 5 girls and 5 boys, with 10 people ($X_{\text{range}}= 14-15$, $X_{\text{mean}}=14.6$). The experimental group had 4

9th-grade, 4 10th-grade, and 2 11th-grade students. In the control group, there were 5 9th-grade and 5 10th-grade students.

Measurement

Young Internet Addiction Test Short Form

The scale developed by Young was converted into a short form by Pawlikowski et al. Kutlu, Savcı, Demir, and Aysan (2016) adapted the Young Internet Addiction Test Short Form to Turkish culture. The Young Internet Addiction Test Short Form consists of 12 items on a five-point Likert scale (1=Never, 5=Very often). The Young Internet Addiction Test Short Form was found to fit well in the confirmatory factor analysis results ($\chi^2=173.58$, $sd=53$, $CFI=0.95$, $SRMR=0.064$, and $RMSEA=0.079$). The internal consistency reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.85. It is seen from the results obtained from the validity and reliability studies that the Young Internet Addiction Test Short Form provides validity and reliability. There is no reverse-scored item in the scale. High scores obtained from the application reveal that internet addiction is high.

Social Media Addiction Scale for Adolescents

The scale was created by Özgenel, Canpolat, and Ekşi in 2019 to develop a valid, reliable, and valuable alternative measurement tool that can be used in research in the field of social media addiction and complies with DSM-5 criteria. The scale was developed for students at the secondary and high school levels. The scale consists of 9 items in total and has a single factor. The scale is a 5-point Likert type. The scale was graded as “Never-1”, “Rarely-2”, “Sometimes-3”, “Mostly-4”, and “Always-5”. There is no reverse-scored item in the scale. The minimum score that can be obtained from the scale is 9, and the highest score that can be obtained is 45. The total score obtained from the scale is calculated by adding the values of the answers given to all the items. A high score on the scale indicates a high level of social media addiction in the individual, while a low score indicates a low level of addiction. As a result of the exploratory factor analysis applied, a 9-item and single-factor structure emerged. The nine-item and single-factor scales explain 56,787 of the total variance. This construct was tested through confirmatory factor analysis. In order to determine the criterion validity of the scale, the “Game Addiction Scale,” a valid and reliable measurement tool, was used to measure similar characteristics. A positive and significant relationship was found between the Social Media Addiction Scale for Adolescents and the Game Addiction Scale at the $r = .554$ level. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as 0.904 (Özgenel, Canpolat, & Ekşi, 2019).

Procedures

The development of this work, based on narrative therapy integrated with spirituality, was inspired by the book “Psychospiritual Development Guide for Group Counseling Practices” by Ekşi and Hatun (2021), the book “101 Techniques with Spiritual Orientation in Psychotherapy and Counseling” edited by Ekşi (2022), and the book “What is Narrative Therapy” by Morgan (2000). Firstly, a narrative therapy-based program integrated with spirituality was prepared sensitively based on the theoretical framework of spirituality and narrative therapy, previous intervention practices, and empirical studies. Before the intervention started, its design was examined by three academicians who are experts in the Guidance and Psychological Counseling field. The design was then rearranged according to their expert opinions. Informed consent forms were obtained from the families of the adolescents in the selected intervention group. All participants were evaluated before and after the intervention, and they were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. The intervention was given once a week, and each session lasted 90 minutes. A total of eight sessions were applied. The general objectives of this process were as follows: (i) to enable young people with internet addiction to position themselves outside of the problem, (ii) to enable them to discover alternative stories in their lives, (iii) to make them realize their values, and (iv) to reduce their dependence on the Internet and to rewrite their situation. Specific topics and activities were designed for each intervention session. A summary of the intervention content is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
The summary of the intervention content

Sessions	Session Content
Week 1	Meet, set the group rules, learn stories about the internet
Week 2	Identifying values, communicating with personal resources, relating to the meaning and values of life
Week 3	Determining life goals in line with values, realizing spiritual resources
Week 4	Externalization, evaluating the effects of internet addiction in different areas
Week 5	Creating alternative stories, creating alternative stories from spiritual stories
Week 6	Revealing the stories shadowed by the problem and reviewing the relationship with the problem
Week 7	Motivation, hope for the future, affirming and supporting their values through role models
Week 8	General summary, listening to the experiences of the process, ceremony, certificate distribution

Data analysis

Since the experimental and control groups comprised 10 people, non-parametric methods were used to analyze the data (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine the differences between the experimental and control groups, and the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test was used to determine within-group differences in repeated measurements. First, the pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups were examined to determine whether they differed. Then, the analysis was conducted to determine whether the groups showed a change in repeated measurements within themselves, and finally, whether there was a difference between the groups in the post-test results.

Results

Findings show the pre-test and post-test mean scores, standard deviations of the experimental and control groups, and differences between and within groups. The pre-test and post-test mean scores and standard deviations of the experimental and control groups are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Young-internet addiction scale and adolescent social media addiction scale pretest-posttest scores of the experimental and control groups

	Experimental Group <i>N</i> =10				Control Group <i>N</i> =10			
	Pre-test		Post-test		Pre-test		Post-test	
	X	Sd	X	Sd	X	Sd	X	Sd
Internet Addiction	33,40	3,921	25,80	5,553	30,40	5,680	30,10	5,425
Social Media Addiction	21,20	3,29	18,0	2,0	16,50	6,381	16,60	6,449

The results obtained from comparing the pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
The results of the Mann-Whitney U Test for pre-test scores of internet addiction and social media addiction levels of experimental and control groups

	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	Z
Internet Addiction	Experimental	10	11,90	119,0	36,0	-1,078
	Control	10	9,10	91,0		
	Total	20				
Social Media Addiction	Experimental	10	12,60	126,0	29,0	-1,619
	Control	10	8,40	84,0		
	Total	10				

As shown in Table 3, no significant difference was found between the two groups on internet addiction ($U=36,0$, $z=-1.078$, $p>.05$) and social media addiction ($U=29,0$, $z=-1.619$, $p>.05$).

Table 4 shows the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests performed to determine whether the internet addiction levels of the experimental and control groups differ between pre-test and post-test measures.

Table 4
The results of The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests for pretest-posttest scores of internet addiction of experimental and control groups

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	z
Experimental Group	Negative Rank	10	5,50	55,00	-2,812
	Positive Rank	0	,00	,00	
	Ties	0			
	Total	10			
Control Group	Negative Rank	3	3,67	11,00	-,966
	Positive Rank	2	2,00	4,00	
	Ties	5			
	Total	10			

As Table 4 shows, there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group ($z=-.2.812, p<.05$). The internet addiction level obtained from the post-test is lower than the pre-test. In other words, the internet addiction levels of the experimental group decreased significantly after group counseling. On the other side, there is no statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the control group on internet addiction levels ($z=-.966, p>.05$).

The results obtained from comparing the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

The results of The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests for pretest-posttest scores of social media addiction of experimental and control groups

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	z
Experimental Group	Negative Rank	8	6,50	52,00	-2,505
	Positive Rank	2	1,50	3,00	
	Ties	0			
	Total	10			
Control Group	Negative Rank	2	3,00	6,00	-,447
	Positive Rank	3	3,00	9,00	
	Ties	5			
	Total	10			

As Table 5 shows, there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental group ($z=-.2.505, p<.05$). The social media addiction level obtained from the post-test is lower than the pre-test. In other words, the social media addiction levels of the experimental group decreased significantly after group counseling. On the other side, there is no statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of the control group on internet addiction levels ($z=-.447, p>.05$).

The results obtained from comparing the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

The results of the Mann-Whitney U Test for post-test scores of internet addiction and social media addiction levels of experimental and control groups

		Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	Z
Internet Addiction	Experimental		10	8,40	84,00	29,000	-1,599
	Control		10	12,60	126,00		
	Total		20				
Social Media Addiction	Experimental		10	10,90	109,00	46,000	-,305
	Control		10	10,10	101,00		
	Total		20				

As shown in Table 6, no significant difference was found between the two groups on internet addiction levels ($U=29.00, z=-1.599, p>.05$) and social media addiction levels ($U=46.00, z=-.305, p>.05$).

Overall, these results indicate that while there is a significant decrease in the internet addiction and social media addiction levels of the experimental group after the group psychoeducation program, this increase is not enough to differ from the control group.

Discussion

This study aimed to develop, implement, and test the effectiveness of an 8-session narrative therapy-based intervention plan to reduce internet and social media addiction. The research used an experimental model with a pre-test and post-test control group design. There was no significant difference between the experimental and control groups in the first measurements taken before the intervention. However, after analyzing the intra-group change following the intervention, a significant reduction in internet and social media addiction levels was observed in the experimental group, while no change was observed in the control group. When the difference between the groups after the intervention was examined, no significant difference was found. These findings suggest that the intervention reduced internet and social media addiction.

The literature shows the effectiveness of narrative therapy-based group work (Koganei et al., 2021; Rodriguez Vega et al., 2013), and narrative therapy has also been used in treating addictions (Singer et al., 2013). Additionally, spiritual interventions have positively affected psychotherapy (Ahmadifaraz et al., 2015; Martinez et al., 2007; Smothers & Koenig, 2018). This study strengthened its effectiveness by combining spirituality and narrative therapy, and it fills a gap in the literature by being the first study to integrate spirituality and narrative therapy in interventions aimed at reducing internet addiction.

Some factors limit the conclusions that can be drawn from these data. For instance, it is a limitation that the balance between men and women among the participants could not be fully achieved, and there was a need for follow-up after the intervention. Furthermore, the study is not supported by qualitative data in data triangulation, and the quasi-experimental design meant that participants were not randomly assigned to an intervention or control group. The findings of this research revealed that the intervention reduced the internet and social media addiction levels of the participants in the experimental group. However, no significant difference was found between the experimental and control groups after the intervention. One possible reason for the lack of significant difference between the groups may be due to the small sample size of the study. With only ten participants in the experimental group, the results may not be generalizable to larger populations. Future studies could address this limitation by increasing the sample size and recruiting participants from diverse backgrounds to improve the generalizability of the findings.

It is worth noting that the study used “Internet Addiction Scale” and “Social Media Addiction Scale for Adolescents” as data collection tools, which have been widely

used in previous research. However, these scales may not capture the full range of internet and social media addiction behaviors, and future studies could consider using additional measures to obtain a more comprehensive assessment of internet and social media addiction.

The study's intervention, spiritually oriented narrative therapy-based group counseling, is a unique approach to addressing internet addiction in adolescents. However, it is essential to note that there are multiple treatment options for internet addiction, and a combination of approaches may be more effective for some individuals. Future research could investigate the effectiveness of combining various therapeutic approaches to treat internet addiction. Future studies should assess internet addiction through psychological interviews and pay attention to treating subtypes of internet addiction. It would also be helpful to involve families in internet addiction studies conducted with adolescents.

Based on the study's findings, several suggestions can be made to address adolescent internet addiction. First, school counselors and mental health professionals could consider incorporating spiritually oriented narrative therapy-based group counseling into their interventions for adolescents with internet addiction. Additionally, they could use the "Internet Addiction Scale" and "Social Media Addiction Scale for Adolescents" as part of their assessment tools for identifying adolescents with internet addiction. Second, parents and guardians could monitor their children's internet and social media usage and educate them on healthy internet and social media habits. Parents and guardians could also limit their children's internet and social media use by setting appropriate boundaries and enforcing them consistently. Third, schools could incorporate digital citizenship education into their curricula to teach students about the responsible use of technology and the potential consequences of excessive internet and social media use.

Given the particularity of internet addiction behaviors, it is crucial to guide youth internet use appropriately and optimize the benefits of the internet for adolescents and children. It is hoped that narrative therapy-based interventions integrated with spirituality in the field will increase. Integrated prevention studies involving school, society, and family can be carried out in future internet or social media addiction studies, as prevention is more critical than intervention in the addiction field. Overall, the article "Spirituality-Integrated Narrative Group Therapy for Adolescent Internet Addiction" provides valuable insights into a promising new approach to treating internet addiction in young people. By highlighting the potential benefits of incorporating spirituality and narrative therapy into treatment, this research could have important implications for mental health practitioners and researchers working in this field.

Acknowledgement. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with ethical standards of the Marmara University/Turkey. Informed consent was given by all study participants.

Ethical approval. The study named “Spirituality-Integrated Narrative Group Therapy for Adolescent Internet Addiction” and approval numbered 01- 22 on 19.01.2023 was examined by the Marmara

University Institute of Educational Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee and it was decided that the research was ethically appropriate.

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