

Examining the Level of Sociotelism in Parents of Children with Special Needs

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Research Article

Received: 9.5.2025

Revised: 25.7.2025

Accepted: 26.7.2025

Abstract

This study investigated whether the levels of sociotelism among parents of children with special needs significantly differed based on gender, age, educational attainment, marital status, and income level. The sample consisted of 326 individuals (261 women, 65 men) aged between 20 and 70. Data were collected using the Personal Information Form and the General Sociotelism Scale and analyzed using SPSS version 29. Significant differences were found in sociotelism and its subdimensions—nomophobia, personal conflict, withdrawal and problem awareness—across the examined demographic variables. For example, male participants scored higher in personal conflict and problem awareness than females, and participants aged 20–40 had higher sociotelism scores compared to those aged 41–70. The findings suggest that age, gender, and income level are critical factors in understanding how parents of children with special needs engage with digital technologies. These results have practical implications for the development of parent support and digital literacy programs tailored to demographic characteristics. Additionally, the study offers theoretical contributions by elucidating the psychosocial outcomes of parental digital technology use.

Keywords: Sociotelism, parental sociotelism, addiction, smartphone, special needs children, parenting, technology.

Özel Gereksinimli Çocuğu Olan Ebeveynlerde Sosyotelizm Düzeyinin İncelenmesi

Öz

Bu çalışmada özel gereksinimli çocuğa sahip ebeveynlerin sosyotelizm düzeylerinin cinsiyet, yaş, eğitim düzeyi, medeni durum ve gelir gibi demografik değişkenlere göre anlamlı farklılık gösterip göstermediği incelenmiştir. Araştırma örneklemini, yaşları 20 ile 70 arasında değişen, 261'i kadın ve 65'i erkek olmak üzere toplam 326 birey oluşturmuştur. Veriler "Kişisel Bilgi Formu" ve "Genel Sosyotelizm Ölçeği" kullanılarak toplanmış ve SPSS 29 programı aracılığıyla analiz edilmiştir. Sosyotelizm puanları ve alt boyutlarında (nomofobi, kişisel çatışma, içe kapanma ve problem farkındalığı) cinsiyet, yaş, eğitim düzeyi, medeni durum ve gelir düzeyine göre anlamlı farklılıklar tespit edilmiştir. Örneğin erkekler kişisel çatışma ve problem farkındalığı boyutlarında kadınlara göre daha yüksek puanlar alırken, 20-40 yaş aralığındaki katılımcıların puanları 41-70 yaş aralığındakilere göre daha yüksek bulunmuştur. Elde edilen bulgular özel gereksinimli çocuklara sahip ebeveynlerin dijital teknolojiyle ilişkilerinde yaş, cinsiyet ve gelir düzeyinin belirleyici olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu sonuçlar ebeveyn destek programlarının ve dijital okuryazarlık çalışmalarının sosyodemografik farklılıklar dikkate alınarak yapılandırılması gerektiğine işaret etmektedir. Ayrıca ebeveynlerin dijital araçları kullanım biçimlerinin psikososyal sonuçlarını anlamada literatüre kuramsal katkı sunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Sosyotelizm, ebeveyn sosyotelizmi, bağımlılık, akıllı telefon, özel gereksinimli çocuklar, ebeveynlik, teknoloji.

To cite this article in APA Style:

Işık Çalan, F., & Öğülmüş, K. (2025). Examining the level of sociotelism in parents of children with special needs. *Bartın University Journal of Faculty of Education*, 14(4), 1085-1097. <https://doi.org/10.14686/buefad.1695981>

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is a period marked by rapid technological advancements and accelerating digitalization that shape human lives. The widespread use of the internet and the integration of technological devices into daily life have significantly influenced society in various ways. Particularly with the rise of easily accessible applications and social media platforms that simplify life, the use of digital devices, especially smartphones, has increased considerably (Kangal Erdem, 2024). Smartphones provide access to a wide range of services, including entertainment, shopping, finance, digital literacy, navigation, and traffic monitoring, making them appealing to large audiences (Thabassum, 2021).

Despite these benefits the integration of smartphones into daily life has also resulted in negative outcomes. One such consequence is sociotetism, also referred to as sociotetism, which is defined as the act of ignoring others in social interactions by focusing on a smartphone (Aagaard, 2019). The functional features of smartphones and their widespread accessibility have made sociotetism a common occurrence in everyday life. Research on this phenomenon often focuses not on specific age groups or environments but on the contexts in which sociotetism behaviors are exhibited or the roles of individuals displaying these behaviors (Aydoğdu & Koçtürk, 2023).

Sociotetism can manifest in various contexts. Parental sociotetism occurs when parents exhibit sociotetism behaviors by focusing on their phones while spending time with their children (Kildare & Middlemiss, 2017). Factors such as the responsibilities of parenthood, pressures from work and social life, and distracting notifications have been identified as contributors to parental sociotetism (McDaniel, 2019). Partner sociotetism refers to one partner prioritizing their phone in romantic relationships leading to the neglect of the other partner. This behavior negatively impacts relationship satisfaction and functional communication between partners (Roberts & David, 2016; Krasnova et al., 2016). Friend sociotetism involves individuals directing their attention to their phones rather than focusing on their friends or group interactions in social settings, which disrupts social relationships and group dynamics (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). Managerial sociotetism, on the other hand, is observed when a manager focuses on their phone during communication with employees, leading to feelings of devaluation among subordinates, reduced work motivation, and diminished professional development, ultimately harming workplace productivity (Özdemir, 2020; David & Roberts, 2017).

Parental sociotetism refers to the excessive use of smartphones by parents, which prevents them from giving adequate attention and care to their children. This behavior disrupts parent-child relationships and negatively affects children's or adolescents' emotional and social development (McDaniel & Radesky, 2018). Children and adolescents exposed to parental sociotetism often feel lonely (Błachnio & Przepiorka, 2018). Such disruptions in parent-child communication can lead to higher levels of academic anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem among children and adolescents (Wang et al., 2020). Additionally, through social learning, children and adolescents may imitate their parents' sociotetist behaviors, triggering similar tendencies in friendships, romantic relationships, and workplace interactions (Liu et al., 2019). During infancy and early childhood, when primary caregivers are most needed, parental sociotetism undermines secure attachment, leading to attachment-related issues (Kildare & Middlemiss, 2017). Consequently, parental sociotetism contributes to a lack of communication within the family and weakens the bond between parent and child (Roberts & David, 2016).

Studies on sociotetism, particularly at the national and international levels, have predominantly focused on romantic and social relationships (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018). Limited research on parental sociotetism primarily involves adolescent samples. For instance, a study conducted with 890 adolescents aged 13–17 found a significant negative relationship between parental sociotetism and adolescents' self-esteem, indicating lower self-esteem among adolescents exposed to this behavior (Gökkaya, 2022). A review examining the negative impacts of parental sociotetism on adolescents highlighted its association with poor self-esteem and various psychosocial issues (Aydoğdu & Koçtürk, 2023). Another study with 1,019 participants aged 11–18 revealed that parental sociotetism and lower empathy levels significantly predicted adolescent sociotetism (Aydoğdu & Yaşar, 2022). Similarly, a qualitative study by Akbağ and Saymer (2021) found that parental sociotetism and technofence disrupt parent-child relationships, leading to psychosocial problems in children across different developmental stages. A study investigating parental sociotetism and children's perceptions of this behavior showed that while parental sociotetism did not vary significantly by age or the number of children, it decreased as parents' education levels increased (Temel, Er & Kandır, 2024).

International studies on parental sociotetism are relatively limited. Research with a large adolescent sample found that parental sociotetism leads to feelings of loneliness, with maternal sociotetism particularly impairing adolescents' perception of maternal acceptance (Wang et al., 2021). Another study demonstrated that parental

sociotelism negatively affects maternal acceptance and has a significant positive relationship with cyberbullying among adolescents (Qu et al., 2020). Similarly, research found that adolescents exposed to parental sociotelism exhibit higher levels of depression and are more likely to engage in sociotelist behaviors themselves (Bai et al., 2020). A study using a relational survey model with 471 participants indicated that parental sociotelism increases social anxiety and smartphone addiction in adolescents (Zhang, Ding & Wang, 2021). Consistent with these findings, research with 726 adolescent participants showed that parental sociotelism contributes to problematic smartphone use (Niu et al., 2020). Another study involving 1,447 adolescents reported that those exposed to parental sociotelism experienced loneliness and problematic smartphone use (Geng et al., 2021). Fu et al. (2020) found that parents' smartphone use and attitudes toward phones significantly influence children's perspectives on and usage of smartphones.

This study aims to examine the sociotelism tendencies of parents of children with special needs. While existing literature has explored general parental technology use, there is a notable lack of research focusing on the digital behavior and psychosocial consequences of technology use among parents of children with special needs. Prior studies have largely overlooked how excessive or maladaptive digital engagements such as nomophobia, digital withdrawal, and decreased awareness of interpersonal issues—may affect communication patterns and emotional availability in these families. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates whether sociotelism levels significantly differ based on demographic factors such as gender, age, education level, employment status, marital status, and income. The findings are expected to offer insights into the impact of digital engagement on parent-child dynamics and contribute to the development of targeted interventions that foster healthier communication within families.

In line with these objectives, the study will examine whether the sociotelism levels of parents of children with special needs significantly differ based on demographic factors, including gender, age, education level, employment status, marital status, and income level.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design, specifically using a survey model. Survey studies aim to reveal various characteristics of the study group (Büyüköztürk et al., 2016). In survey research, analyzing and describing relationships between variables is essential (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2006). Descriptive analysis was primarily utilized in this study. Descriptive analysis refers to the use of quantitative data to describe findings (Creswell, 2008).

Study Group

The study used a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling involves selecting individuals or objects with specific characteristics deemed relevant to the research topic (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2014). In this study, data were collected from 326 parents of children with special needs, based on the principle of voluntary participation. A descriptive table of the study group is provided below.

Table 1. Distribution of the Study Group by Demographic Variables

Variables	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	261	80,1
	Male	65	19,9
Age	20-40 years	188	57,7
	41-70 years	138	42,3
Education Level	Primary School	88	27
	Secondary School	85	26,1
	High School	101	31
	University and above	52	16
Employment Status	Employed	92	28,2
	Unemployed	234	71,8
Marital Status	Married	283	86,8
	Single	21	6,4
	Divorced (separated or widowed)	22	6,7

Table 4 (continued)

Variables	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Income Level	Low	59	18,1
	Medium	231	70,9
	High	36	11
Total		326	100

An examination of the descriptive statistics of the demographic data from the study (Table 1) reveals that 80.1% of the participants are female, while 19.9% are male. Among the participants, 57.7% fall within the 20–40 age range, and 42.3% are aged between 41–70. Regarding educational level, the highest percentage is high school graduates at 31%, followed by primary school at 27%. Middle school accounts for 26.1%, while university graduates make up 15.3%, and postgraduate education accounts for 0.6%. In terms of employment status, 71.8% of participants reported being unemployed, whereas 28.2% stated they were employed. Regarding marital status, 86.3% of participants are married, 6.4% are single, and 6.7% are divorced or widowed. When examining income levels, 70.9% of participants are in the middle-income group, 18.1% in the low-income group, and 11% in the high-income group.

Data Collection Tool

A Personal Information Form was used to collect demographic information from participants, while the General Sociotism Scale was administered to measure the sociotism levels of parents. The Personal Information Form included questions about gender, age, education level, employment status, marital status, and income level. A review of sociotism measurement tools in the literature identified six different scales developed or adapted for this purpose. Among them, the General Sociotism Scale, developed by Chotpitayasunondh and Douglas in 2018 and validated and adapted into Turkish by Göksun and Orhan, was selected for this research. This 15-item scale comprises four subdimensions: nomophobia, interpersonal conflict, self-isolation, and problem awareness. Reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.86 for the overall scale. Subdimension reliability coefficients were 0.78 for nomophobia, 0.74 for interpersonal conflict, 0.84 for self-isolation, and 0.73 for problem awareness. The scale employs a 7-point Likert format (1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Occasionally, 4 = Sometimes, 5 = Often, 6 = Generally, 7 = Always) with no reverse-scored items, where higher scores indicate higher levels of sociotism (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2018; Göksun & Orhan, 2019).

Reliability analysis of the scale items yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.88, confirming its reliability. Subdimension reliability analyses showed that the nomophobia subdimension (items 1, 2, 3, and 4) had a reliability coefficient of 0.77, while the interpersonal conflict subdimension (items 5, 6, 7, and 8) scored 0.80. The self-isolation subdimension (items 9, 10, 11, and 12) demonstrated a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.90, and the problem awareness subdimension (items 13, 14, and 15) scored 0.62.

Data Collection and Analysis

To ensure proper use of the scale in accordance with copyright regulations permission was obtained via email from the researchers who conducted the validity and reliability studies of the scale. The data collection process lasted approximately three months during which special education schools offering primary, secondary, and tertiary-level education in three provinces were visited. In collaboration with school administrators, guidance counselors, and special education teachers, the Personal Information Form and the General Sociotism Scale were distributed to parents through their children. The completed forms were then collected by school administrators, special education teachers, and guidance counselors and subsequently delivered to the researcher.

For data analysis the collected data were first organized and classified using Microsoft Office Excel. Subsequently the analysis process was conducted using the 'IBM SPSS Statistics' program. Within SPSS the data underwent calculations for normality, reliability, frequency, and percentage distributions, followed by ANOVA, T-test, and Kruskal-Wallis analyses. Findings from each analysis were explained in detail.

Research Ethics

This study was carried out in accordance with established ethical principles and approved by the relevant ethics committee (Protocol Number 269342 at Kırıkkale University). All participants were informed about the

purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, and confidentiality and anonymity of the data were ensured throughout the research process. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all data were used solely for scientific purposes.

FINDINGS

A normality test was conducted to determine whether the data obtained in this study were suitable for parametric analyses. In social science research, skewness and kurtosis values between -1.5 and +1.5 indicate that the data follow a normal distribution (Fidell & Tabachnick, 2014). As shown in Table 2 the skewness and kurtosis values for the scale and its subdimension scores indicate that the data exhibit a normal distribution.

Table 2. Descriptive Analyses for the General Sociotelism Scale and Its Subdimensions

Variables	Min	Max	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Sociotelism Scale	15	77	37,69	14,24	0,54	-0,13
Nomophobia Sub-Dimension	4	28	13,68	5,28	0,10	-0,66
Personal Conflict Sub-Dimension	4	21	7,44	4,03	1,25	0,86
Self-Isolation Sub-Dimension	4	24	8,70	5,04	1,02	0,19
Problem Awareness Sub-Dimension	3	19	7,87	3,97	0,42	-0,70

As shown in Table 2, the mean score for the General Sociotelism Scale (Sociotelism Scale) was $M = 37.69$ ($SD = 14.24$). Among the subdimensions, the mean score was $M = 13.68$ ($SD = 5.28$) for nomophobia, $M = 7.44$ ($SD = 4.03$) for interpersonal conflict, $M = 8.70$ ($SD = 5.04$) for self-isolation, and $M = 7.87$ ($SD = 3.97$) for problem awareness.

Table 3. Sociotelism Scores by Gender

Variable	Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	t	df	p
General Sociotelism Scale	Female	261	37,03	14,28	-1,662	324	,098
	Male	65	40,31	13,89			

$p < .05^*$ $p < .01^{**}$

As shown in Table 3, General Sociotelism Scale scores of the study group do not differ significantly by gender ($t = -1.662$, $p > .05$). In other words, sociotelism scores do not vary based on whether participants are male or female.

Table 4. Sub-Dimension Scores by Gender

Variables	Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	t	df	p
Nomophobia	Female	261	13,41	5,05	-1,673	87,56	,098
	Male	65	14,77	6,04			
Personal Conflict	Female	261	7,11	3,95	-3,003	324	,003**
	Male	65	8,77	4,1			
Self-Isolation	Female	261	8,88	5,09	1,277	324	,202
	Male	65	7,98	4,84			
Problem Awareness	Female	261	7,64	4,06	-2,303	112,07	,023*
	Male	65	8,78	3,47			

$p < .05^*$ $p < .01^{**}$

According to the analysis results (Table 4) the scores for nomophobia ($t = -1.673$, $p > .05$) and self-isolation ($t = 1.277$, $p > .05$) subdimensions do not differ significantly by gender. In other words nomophobia and self-isolation scores are not influenced by whether the participant is male or female. However the scores for the personal conflict subdimension ($t = -3.003$, $p < .01$) show a statistically significant difference by gender. When comparing personal conflict scores males ($M = 8.77$) scored significantly higher than females ($M = 7.11$). Similarly the scores for the problem awareness subdimension ($t = -2.303$, $p < .05$) differ significantly by gender. Male participants ($M = 8.78$) scored significantly higher than female participants ($M = 7.64$) in this subdimension.

Table 5. Scale Scores by Age

Variable	Age	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	t	df	p
General Sociotelist Scale	20-40 years	188	39,61	13,31	2,870	324	,004*
	41-70 years	138	35,07	15,08			

$p < .05^*$ $p < .01^{**}$

Based on the analysis results presented in Table 5 the sociotelism scores of participants ($t = 2.870$, $p < .05$) differ significantly by age. When comparing sociotelism levels by age group, the mean score for participants aged 20–40 ($M = 39.61$) was found to be significantly higher than the mean score for participants aged 41–70 ($M = 35.07$).

Table 6. Sub-Dimension Scores by Age

Variables	Age	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	t	df	p
Nomophobia	20-40 years	188	14,48	4,98	3,227	324	,001**
	41-70 years	138	12,59	5,50			
Personal Conflict	20-40 years	188	7,71	4	1,391	324	,165
	41-70 years	138	7,08	4,05			
Self-Isolation	20-40 years	188	9,19	4,94	2,042	324	,042*
	41-70 years	138	8,04	5,13			
Problem Awareness	20-40 years	188	8,23	3,94	1,963	324	,050*
	41-70 years	138	7,36	3,98			

$p < .05^*$ $p < .01^{**}$

According to Table 6 the personal conflict subdimension scores ($t = 1.391$, $p > .05$) do not show a statistically significant difference based on age. However, the nomophobia subdimension scores ($t = 3.227$, $p < .01$) differ significantly by age. When comparing nomophobia levels, the mean score for participants aged 20–40 ($M = 14.48$) is significantly higher than for those aged 41–70 ($M = 12.59$). Similarly, the self-isolation subdimension scores ($t = 2.042$, $p < .05$) show a statistically significant difference by age, with the mean score for

participants aged 20–40 ($M = 9.19$) being significantly higher than for those aged 41–70 ($M = 8.04$). Additionally the problem awareness subdimension scores ($t = 1.963$, $p < .05$) also differ significantly by age, with participants aged 20–40 ($M = 8.23$) scoring significantly higher than those aged 41–70 ($M = 7.36$).

Table 7. Scale Scores by Employment Status

Variable	Employment Status	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	t	df	p
General Sociotelist Scale	Employed	92	38,61	12,88	,776	189,39	,439
	Unemployed	234	37,32	14,75			

$p < .05^*$ $p < .01^{**}$

According to the analysis results presented in Table 7 the General Sociotelism Scale scores ($t = 0.776$, $p > .05$) do not differ significantly based on employment status. In other words, whether participants are employed or unemployed does not significantly affect their sociotelism levels.

Table 8. Sub-Dimension Scores by Employment Status

Variables	Employment Status	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	t	df	p
Nomophobia	Employed	92	15,34	5,86	3,342	143,59	,001**
	Unemployed	234	13,03	4,90			
Personal Conflict	Employed	92	7,33	3,62	-,324	324	,746
	Unemployed	234	7,49	4,18			
Self-Isolation	Employed	92	7,92	4,52	-1,856	190,50	,065
	Unemployed	234	9	5,21			
Problem Awareness	Employed	92	8,02	3,88	,445	324	,656
	Unemployed	234	7,80	4,02			

$p < .05^*$ $p < .01^{**}$

As shown in Table 8 the subdimension scores for personal conflict ($t = -0.324$, $p > .05$), self-isolation ($t = -1.856$, $p > .05$), and problem awareness ($t = 0.445$, $p > .05$) do not show a statistically significant difference based on employment status. In other words, personal conflict, self-isolation, and problem awareness scores are not affected by whether participants are employed or unemployed. However, nomophobia scores ($t = 3.342$, $p < .01$) differ significantly by employment status. The mean nomophobia scores of participants who reported being employed ($M = 15.34$) are significantly higher than those of unemployed participants ($M = 13.03$).

Table 9. Scores by Education Level

Variable	Education	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	F	df	p	Difference
General Sociotelist Scale	Primary School	88	32,39	12,65	7,42	3	,001**	High school > Primary school
	Secondary School	85	37,68	14,27				
	High School	101	41,85	14,56				
	University and above	52	38,58	13,58				

$p < .05^*$ $p < .01^{**}$

The analysis results presented in Table 9 indicate that the General Sociotelism Scale scores of participants differ significantly based on education level, $F(3,322) = 7.420$, $p < .01$. In other words, education level significantly affects sociotelism scores. Participants with a high school education have significantly higher sociotelism scores compared to those with a primary school education.

Table 10. Sub-Dimension Scores by Education Level

Variables	Education	N	$\bar{x}$	Ss	F	df	p	Difference
Nomophobia	Primary School	88	11,65	4,88	9,478	3	,001**	University> primary,secondary, high school
	Secondary School	85	13,09	4,77				
	High School	101	15,11	5,4		322		
	University and above	52	15,31	5,29				
Personal Conflict	Primary School	88	6,65	3,48	2,298	3	0,077	-
	Secondary School	85	8	4,52				
	High School	101	7,88	4,17		322		
	University and above	52	7,02	3,6				
Self-Isolation	Primary School	88	7,49	3,93	3,383	3	0,02*	High school > primary school
	Secondary School	85	8,76	4,84				
	High School	101	9,63	5,68		156,92		
	University and above	52	8,83	5,44				
Problem Awareness	Primary School	88	6,6	3,2	8,426	3	,001**	High school> primary school
	Secondary School	85	7,82	4,17				
	High School	101	9,23	3,98		157,35		
	University and above	52	7,42	4,11				

p< .05* p< .01**

According to the results presented in Table 10 nomophobia scores significantly differ by education level, $F(3,322) = 9.478$, $p < .01$. In other words, education level has a statistically significant effect on participants' nomophobia levels. Tukey test results indicate that participants with a university education have significantly higher nomophobia scores compared to those with primary, middle, or high school education ($p < .01$). Additionally, participants with a high school education have significantly higher nomophobia scores than those with primary or middle school education ($p < .05$). These findings suggest that as education level increases, nomophobia levels also increase.

The personal conflict subdimension scores, $F(3,322) = 2.298$, $p > .05$, do not show a statistically significant difference based on education level. However, self-isolation scores differ significantly by education level, $F(3,156.92) = 3.383$, $p < .05$, indicating that education level has a significant effect on self-isolation levels. Participants with a high school education have significantly higher self-isolation scores compared to those with a primary school education. Similarly, problem awareness scores also show a statistically significant difference by education level, $F(3,157.35) = 8.426$, $p < .01$. Participants with a high school education have significantly higher problem awareness scores compared to those with a primary school education. These results suggest that education level significantly affects participants' levels of self-isolation and problem awareness.

Table 11. Scores by Marital Status

Variable	Marital Status	N	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	p	Difference
General Sociotelist Scale	Married	283	14,106	2	,001**	Single>married and divorced
	Single	21				
	Divorced (separated or widowed)	22				

p< .05* p< .01**

The General Sociotelist Scale scores of participants differ significantly based on marital status (Table 11), $H = 14.106$, $p < .01$. According to the post hoc (Games-Howell) analysis results single individuals have

significantly higher total sociotelism scores compared to married individuals. Similarly, single individuals' scores are significantly higher than those of divorced or widowed individuals.

Table 12. Scores by Income Level

Variable	Income	N	Kruskal-Wallis H	df	p	Fark
General Sociotelist Scale	Low	59	30,269	2	,001**	medium> low
	Medium	231				high> low
	High	36				high> medium

p< .05* p< .01**

The General Sociotelism Scale scores of participants differ significantly based on income level (Table 12), $H = 30.269$, $p < .01$. Post hoc (Games-Howell) analysis results indicate that as income level increases, total sociotelism scores also increase significantly.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The General Sociotelism Scale, nomophobia, and self-isolation subdimension scores of the participants did not differ significantly by gender. On the other hand, it was observed that personal conflict and problem awareness scores were higher among men compared to women. A review of the literature revealed studies indicating that sociotelism scores vary by gender (Alver, 2023; Babadağ Savaş & Balcı Alpaslan, 2021; Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016; Davey et al., 2018; Kahraman, 2023; Karadağ et al., 2015; Yücel, 2024). However, there are also studies that align with the findings of this research, reporting no significant relationship between sociotelism scores and gender (Abramova et al., 2017; Aykaç & Yıldırım, 2021; Latifa et al., 2019; Parmaksız, 2019; Polat & Karasu, 2022). As can be seen, there are differing studies in the literature regarding the statistical relationship between sociotelism and gender.

Based on the findings of this study, the lack of variation in sociotelism levels by gender may be attributed to the increasing equality of social roles between genders in modern societies. Furthermore, the absence of gender differences in sociotelism, nomophobia, and self-isolation scores may indicate that individuals, regardless of gender, share similar experiences in forming social connections, maintaining their relationships with technology, and tendencies toward isolation. Parents of children with special needs may generally prioritize their child's needs regardless of gender. On the other hand, the higher personal conflict and problem awareness scores among men could be attributed to societal norms that often discourage emotional expression among men, leading to higher levels of awareness regarding their personal conflicts or problems. The conflicting findings in the literature suggest that such differences may vary depending on cultural context, socioeconomic status, and individual differences.

This study found that sociotelism scores increased as income level increased. In other words, participants with higher income levels also had higher sociotelism scores. A study conducted in 2019 found a significant relationship between income level and sociotelism, reporting that individuals with lower income levels had higher sociotelism scores compared to those with higher income levels (Karaş, 2019). Conversely, another study conducted with 151 participants found no differences in General Sociotelism Scale scores by income level (Çetinkaya Büyükbodur & Uğurlu, 2021). The finding in this study that participants with higher income levels had higher sociotelism scores can be attributed to the ease of access to digital devices and increased investment in technology associated with higher income. Differences in the context and timing of these studies, as well as varying economic and social conditions, may explain the differing effects of income level on sociotelism.

When sociotelism levels were evaluated by age, a significant difference was found, with participants aged 20–40 scoring higher than those aged 41–70. Contrary to this study's findings, a study conducted with university students found no significant effect of age on sociotelism (Aykaç & Yıldırım, 2021). Similarly, another study conducted with 369 university students reported no significant relationship between age and sociotelism levels (Alver, 2023). However, some studies in the literature have found that age significantly affects sociotelism scores, with younger participants having higher sociotelism scores, consistent with the results of this study (Han et al., 2022; Karaş, 2019). The higher sociotelism scores among individuals aged 20–40 in this study may be explained by their greater reliance on smartphones due to work life, social environments, and family responsibilities associated with having children with special needs.

This study also identified a statistically significant relationship between marital status and sociotelism. Single participants had higher sociotelism scores compared to married or divorced/widowed participants. Supporting this finding, a study conducted in 2021 reported a significant relationship between marital status and sociotelism tendencies, with single participants exhibiting higher sociotelism tendencies (Parmaksız, 2021). On the other hand, another study involving 1,026 participants found a significant relationship between marital status and sociotelism, reporting that married individuals had significantly higher sociotelism scores (Karaş, 2019).

There are limited studies in the current literature that directly examine the relationship between sociotelism and marital status. Therefore, further research is needed to better understand how sociotelism behaviors differ based on marital status. Specifically, comparing sociotelism levels among married, single, divorced, or widowed parents of children with special needs could fill this knowledge gap. Based on the findings of this study, single parents of children with special needs may turn to digital connections more frequently to alleviate stress, reduce feelings of loneliness, or fulfill their need for social bonds, potentially increasing sociotelism behaviors.

While this study found no significant differences in overall sociotelism scores based on employment status, nomophobia subdimension scores differed significantly by this variable. Employed participants had higher nomophobia scores compared to unemployed participants. Supporting this finding, a study conducted with university students reported no significant relationship between overall sociotelism scores and employment status but found that employed students had significantly higher nomophobia scores compared to unemployed students (Alver, 2023). Another study found that employed participants had significantly higher sociotelism scores compared to student participants (Karaş, 2019). While employed parents may have opportunities to engage in social interactions in the workplace, the caregiving responsibilities associated with having a child with special needs may limit their social relationships outside of work. Thus, the relationship between employment status and sociotelism may not be generalizable in the context of parenting children with special needs. On the other hand, the lower nomophobia scores among unemployed parents could be explained by the fact that these parents are often directly responsible for the care of their children. Being physically present with their children may reduce their dependence on smartphones or other technologies.

When comparing these findings with studies in the literature, both similarities and differences are evident. Although research on sociotelism has become more common in recent years, there remains a significant gap in the literature on this topic. Specifically, the absence of studies addressing the sociotelism levels of parents of children with special needs highlights an important gap. In this context, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to the literature.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study provides important insights into the sociotelism tendencies of parents with children with special needs; however, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The sample consisted exclusively of parents of children with special needs, and no comparison group of parents without special needs children was included, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The study's cross-sectional design further restricts the ability to observe changes over time or establish causal relationships between demographic variables and sociotelism levels. Additionally, the research was conducted in a specific cultural context, which may limit the applicability of the findings to other cultural or societal settings.

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed for future research and practical applications. Future studies could include parents without children with special needs to examine statistical differences between groups or employ longitudinal designs to explore the effects of age and generational differences on sociotelism and its subdimensions. Cross-cultural studies could investigate the influence of cultural differences on sociotelism levels, while experimental research could evaluate the impact of interventions targeting parents of children with special needs on sociotelism and other psychosocial factors. Qualitative methods could be employed to gain deeper insights into how parents in different age groups perceive and interpret sociotelism behaviors, and future studies could explore sociotelism in relation to variables such as social network size, emotional support levels, and loneliness. Practically, awareness programs addressing sociotelism, particularly for parents aged 20–40 who are at higher risk for nomophobia, self-isolation, and problem awareness, should be implemented. Trainings promoting balanced smartphone use could help reduce nomophobia and self-isolation among parents, while digital detox programs could support working parents in achieving a healthy work-life balance. Moreover, educational institutions and workplaces should offer training on sociotelism, digital literacy, and ethical technology use to promote conscious use of digital tools.

Statements of Publication Ethics

We declare that we obeyed the principles of publication ethics. This research was approved by the Kırıkkale University Human Subjects Ethics Committee (Decision no: 269342).

Researchers' Contribution Rate

Authors	Literature review	Method	Data Collection	Data Analysis	Results	Conclusion
Author 1	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒
Author 2	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒	☒

Conflict of Interest

We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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