

Digital Reflection of Emotional Burden: The Mediating Role of Behavioral Problems Between Internalizing Problems and Internet Addiction

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Abstract: This study examines the mediating role of behavioral problems in the relationship between internalizing problems and internet addiction among adolescents. The research was conducted within a predictive correlational model with 272 adolescents (54.8% female, 45.2% male) aged between 13 and 18. Data were collected using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and the Young Internet Addiction Scale-Short Form. Mediation analysis with 10,000 bootstrap resamples revealed that internalizing problems significantly and positively predicted internet addiction ($\beta = .21$) and behavioral problems ($\beta = .49$). Behavioral problems also emerged as a strong predictor of internet addiction ($\beta = .33$). Most notably, when behavioral problems were included in the model, the direct effect of internalizing problems on internet addiction became non-significant ($\beta = .05$, $p = .457$), while the indirect effect remained significant ($\beta = .16$). These findings demonstrate that behavioral problems play a *full mediating* role between internalizing problems and internet addiction. The research highlights the necessity of holistic intervention strategies that address both emotional and behavioral processes in combating internet addiction among adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescence, internet addiction, internalizing problems, behavioral problems

Duygusal Yükün Dijital Yansıması: İçselleştirme Problemleri ve İnternet Bağımlılığı Arasında Davranış Problemlerinin Aracı Rolü

Öz: Bu araştırma, ergenlerde içselleştirme problemleri ile internet bağımlılığı arasındaki ilişkide davranış problemlerinin aracı rolünü incelemektedir. Çalışma, yaşları 13 ile 18 arasında değişen 272 ergen (%54.8 kadın, %45.2 erkek) ile yordayıcı korelasyonel model çerçevesinde yürütülmüştür. Veriler "Güçler ve Güçlükler Anketi" ve "Young İnternet Bağımlılığı Ölçeği Kısa Formu" ile toplanmıştır. Aracılık analizi ve 10.000 bootstrap örnekleme kullanılarak yapılan analizler, içselleştirme problemlerinin internet bağımlılığını ($\beta = .21$) ve davranış problemlerini ($\beta = .49$) anlamlı ve pozitif yönde yordadığını göstermiştir. Davranış problemleri de internet bağımlılığının güçlü bir yordayıcısı olarak bulunmuştur ($\beta = .33$). En önemli bulgu, davranış problemlerinin modele dahil edilmesiyle içselleştirme problemlerinin internet bağımlılığı üzerindeki doğrudan etkisinin anlamsız hale gelmesi ($\beta = .05$, $p = .457$) ve dolaylı etkinin anlamlı olmasıdır ($\beta = .16$). Bu sonuç, davranış problemlerinin içselleştirme problemleri ile internet bağımlılığı arasında "tam aracı" rolü üstlendiğini kanıtlamaktadır. Araştırma, ergenlerde internet bağımlılığıyla mücadelede duygusal ve davranışsal süreçleri birlikte ele alan bütüncül müdahale stratejilerinin gerekliliğini vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ergenlik, İnternet bağımlılığı, içselleştirme problemleri, davranış problemleri

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Introduction

In the current era of rapid digitalization, internet technologies have profoundly reshaped numerous domains of everyday life, including how people communicate, access information, socialize, and manage daily routines (Akbari et al., 2023). For adolescents in particular, the internet is no longer just a means of communication; it has become a central setting for identity exploration, social bonding, belongingness, and recreational activities (Güney & Taştepe, 2020; Holtz & Appel, 2011). Nevertheless, when internet use becomes excessive and uncontrolled, it gives rise to a major psychosocial issue known by several terms such as "Internet Addiction" (IA), "Problematic Internet Use" (PIU), or "Pathological Internet Use" (Bozkurt et al., 2016; Brand et al., 2014; Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez, 2016).

The concept of internet addiction first emerged in the 1990s in the work of Goldberg and Young (Davis, 2001; Young, 1998). Drawing on DSM-IV criteria for pathological gambling, Young (1998) characterized this disorder using indicators such as persistent preoccupation with online activities, increasing tolerance, inability to control usage, withdrawal symptoms, and persistent use despite harmful outcomes (Bozkurt et al., 2016; Young, 1998). Adopting a cognitive-behavioral lens, Davis (2001) argued that the specific psychological needs satisfied by internet use are central to the development of addiction (Brand et al., 2014). More recent perspectives emphasize that internet addiction should be assessed not merely by the amount of time spent online but also by the personal function that internet use serves for the individual (De Leo & Wulfert, 2013). Notably, heightened internet use aimed at relieving loneliness, escaping social interactions, or regulating emotions has been linked to increased addiction risk (Caplan, 2003; Kandell, 1998). The inclusion of Internet Gaming Disorder in the DSM-5 further underscores the clinical relevance of this behavioral pattern (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013; Kuss et al., 2014).

Adolescence is a crucial developmental phase marked by substantial biological, psychological, and social transitions, during which identity formation becomes especially prominent (Bornstein et al., 2026; Effatpanah et al., 2020; Fontana et al., 2022). During this period, a strong desire for peer approval, sensation seeking, and the still-developing prefrontal cortex can lead to weaker impulse control (Brand et al., 2014; Holtz & Appel, 2011). As a result, teenagers are more susceptible to the immediate reward systems embedded in digital environments. Research conducted in Türkiye indicates that the prevalence of internet addiction among adolescents ranges from 2% to 38%, highlighting the widespread nature of this issue (Gökçearslan & Günbatar, 2012; Sallayıcı & Yöndem, 2020).

One significant psychological factor associated with internet addiction is internalizing problems (Anderson et al., 2017; Yang & Zhu, 2023). These refer to emotionally oriented difficulties turned inward, including depression, anxiety, loneliness, social withdrawal, and feelings of worthlessness (Achenbach, 1991; Achenbach et al., 2016; Graber, 2004). Because these signs are often not easily visible to outsiders, they are sometimes labeled as "hidden problems" (Pace et al., 2019). Adolescents who experience high social anxiety may view the internet as a safer social setting and consequently avoid in-person interactions (Caplan, 2003; McKenna et al., 2002). Numerous studies have confirmed a robust and reciprocal relationship between internalizing problems and internet addiction (Anderson et al., 2017; Zhou et al., 2023). Greater internet use may further exacerbate social isolation, thereby reinforcing internalizing symptoms (Kraut et al., 1998; van den Eijnden et al., 2008, 2010).

Beyond internalizing issues, externalizing behavioral problems represent another key risk factor for internet addiction. Behavioral problems encompass outwardly directed patterns such as aggression, impulsivity, rule-breaking, and disruptive actions (Achenbach, 1991; Achenbach et al., 2016; Loeber & Burke., 2011). These behaviors are closely tied to low self-control and are shaped by both personal and environmental influences (Achenbach et al., 2016). Impulsiveness and deficits in self-regulation have been recognized as shared risk factors for both internet addiction and behavioral problems (Pace et al., 2019; Gentile et al., 2011; Ko et al., 2009). Furthermore, online games and digital communication platforms may reinforce aggressive tendencies (Weeks et al., 2016; Holtz & Appel, 2011).

From a theoretical standpoint, internet addiction is understood not simply as a technology-related disorder but as a multidimensional psychosocial phenomenon arising from the interplay of emotional and behavioral processes (Fontana et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2023). The Compensatory Internet Use Model proposes that individuals resort to the internet as a way to escape negative emotional states (Fontana et al., 2022; Gu et al., 2023). In parallel, Self-Determination Theory suggests that failure to satisfy basic psychological needs can result in maladaptive behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gu et al., 2023). In this context, adverse childhood experiences and family conflict have been shown to elevate both internalizing and behavioral problems, thereby fostering internet addiction (Arslan, 2017; Wu et al., 2022).

The mediating function of behavioral problems can be interpreted through Problem Behavior Theory. According to this framework, risky behaviors such as internet addiction, substance misuse, and aggression share common psychosocial roots and tend to cluster together (De Leo & Wulfert, 2013; Jessor, 1987; Sung et al., 2013). Adolescents suffering from internal distress may externalize their difficulties through problematic behaviors, which can heighten interpersonal conflicts and turn internet use into a coping or escape mechanism (Akbari et al., 2023; Yang & Zhu, 2023). Thus, behavioral problems may serve as a crucial link between internalizing problems and internet addiction.

Recent network analyses have further revealed that symptoms including social anxiety, worthlessness, interpersonal difficulties, and irritability occupy central positions within these relationships (Zhou et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2025). Physical activity has also emerged as a protective factor capable of reducing both internet addiction and internalizing symptoms (Zhu et al., 2025). In the family sphere, effective parent-child communication and parental oversight act as buffers against risk, while family discord tends to elevate risk levels (Ang et al., 2012; van den Eijnden et al., 2010).

Although prior research has individually explored the connections between internet addiction and internalizing or externalizing problems, the literature still lacks comprehensive models that explain how internalizing problems lead to internet addiction specifically through behavioral problems (Fineberg et al., 2018; Fontana et al., 2022). This gap constitutes the primary motivation for the current study.

The aim of this study is to examine the mediating role of behavioral problems in the relationship between internalizing problems and internet addiction among adolescents. In this context, the following H1 hypotheses were tested:

- 1- Internalizing problems significantly predict internet addiction.
- 2- Internalizing problems significantly predict behavioral problems.
- 3- Behavioral problems significantly predict internet addiction.

- 4- Behavioral problems have a mediating role in the relationship between internalizing problems and internet addiction.

This study conceptualizes internet addiction not merely as a behavioral pattern associated with technology use, but as a multidimensional psychosocial phenomenon shaped by the reciprocal interaction of emotional and behavioral processes. In this regard, the study emphasizes the importance of evaluating internalizing and externalizing processes together with environmental factors in adolescent mental health and provides a theoretical framework for holistic intervention approaches.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to efforts aimed at preventing and reducing internet addiction among adolescents. As emphasized in the literature, interventions focusing solely on limiting internet use duration may be insufficient; instead, holistic approaches involving emotional regulation skills, behavioral control, improvement of family communication, and support for basic psychological needs appear to produce more effective outcomes (Effatpanah et al., 2020; Gu et al., 2023). Therefore, adolescent psychological well-being should be considered within the broader context of individual characteristics as well as family and social environments.

In conclusion, this study aimed to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of adolescent mental health by examining the mediating role of behavioral problems in the relationship between internalizing problems and internet addiction. The findings are expected to support the development of more comprehensive prevention and intervention programs that simultaneously address internalizing and behavioral difficulties while also incorporating family and environmental factors.

Method

Research Design

This study has been conducted to determine the relationship between adolescents' perceptions of internalizing problems and internet addiction, and to examine the mediating effect of adolescents' perceptions of behavioral problems on this relationship. The research was carried out within the framework of a predictive correlational research design, which is part of the descriptive survey model in quantitative research methods. Predictive correlational research designs are defined as research models aimed at examining the interactions among multiple independent variables and the level of relationships between these variables (Karasar, 2014; Şata, 2020).

Population and Sample

An a priori power analysis was conducted using Gpower 3.1 to assess the adequacy of the sample size. The mediation model was evaluated within a multiple linear regression framework, with the independent variable and the mediator entered as two predictors of the outcome variable. Assuming a medium effect size ($f^2 = .15$), an alpha level of .05, and a statistical power of .95, the minimum required sample size was estimated to be 107 participants. The final sample consisted of 272 participants, exceeding the minimum required sample size and indicating that the study had sufficient statistical power to conduct the mediation analysis.

The population of the study consisted of adolescent individuals, while the sample included a total of 272 participants selected through convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method. Following the completion of data collection, data screening and cleaning procedures were

conducted. The analyses revealed no missing data or outliers; therefore, all analyses were performed using the complete dataset. The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, the gender distribution of the adolescents was relatively balanced, with female participants slightly outnumbering males. Regarding grade level, the highest participation rate was observed among 9th-grade students, whereas 11th-grade students constituted the smallest group. In terms of perceived socioeconomic status, the majority of participants identified themselves as belonging to the middle socioeconomic level. Concerning age distribution, participants aged 14 years and younger represented the largest group, whereas 16-year-old adolescents represented the smallest group.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics Regarding Adolescents' Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Variables		Freuency	Percentage
Gender	Female	149	54.8
	Male	123	45.2
Grade Level	9. grade	95	34.9
	10. grade	82	30.1
	11. grade	38	14.0
	12. grade	57	21.0
Perceived Socioeconomic Status	Very low	45	16.5
	Low	54	19.9
	Moderate	97	35.7
	High	76	27.9
Age Level	14 years and below (12 participants were 13 years old)	90	33.1
	15 years	84	30.9
	16 years	40	14.7
	17 years and above (9 participants were 18 years old)	58	21.3
Total		272	100.0

Data Collection Instruments

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ-Tur)

The SDQ consists of 25 items rated on a 3-point Likert scale and evaluates both positive and negative behavioral patterns. The scale includes five subdimensions: Emotional Symptoms, Conduct Problems, Hyperactivity/Inattention, Peer Problems, and Prosocial Behaviors. While the first four subdimensions assess psychological difficulties, the Prosocial Behaviors subdimension evaluates positive characteristics. In accordance with the standard SDQ literature, the Emotional

Symptoms and Peer Problems subscales were combined to represent internalizing problems, whereas the Conduct Problems and Hyperactivity/Inattention subscales were combined to represent externalizing/behavioral problems (Goodman, 1997; Achenbach et al., 2016). The total difficulties score is obtained by summing the first four subscales. Parent and teacher forms are available for children aged 4–16 years, while a self-report form is available for adolescents aged 11–18 years. In the Turkish adaptation study, the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was reported as .73, indicating acceptable reliability (Güvenir et al., 2008).

Young Internet Addiction Test-Short Form (YIAT-SF)

The Young Internet Addiction Test-Short Form was developed by Pawlikowski et al. (2013) through the adaptation of the original scale developed by Young. The scale consists of 12 items rated on a five-point Likert scale and aims to assess individuals' levels of internet addiction. Higher scores indicate higher levels of internet addiction. Validity and reliability studies of the original form demonstrated that the scale is a reliable and valid measurement instrument, with an internal consistency coefficient of .85. The Turkish adaptation, validity, and reliability studies of the scale were conducted by Kutlu et al. (2016).

Normality and Reliability Analyses of the Measurement Instruments

To determine the distributional properties of the data obtained from the measurement instruments, skewness and kurtosis coefficients were examined. In addition, descriptive statistics were calculated to identify the general characteristics of the data. Reliability analyses were conducted using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Descriptive statistics and reliability values of the measurement instruments are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Skewness, Kurtosis, and Reliability Values of Measurement Scores

Variables	Min.	Max.	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's α
Internalizing Problems	0.00	2.00	0.83	0.36	-0.19	-0.39	.73
Behavioral Problems	0.00	2.00	0.75	0.38	0.44	-0.34	.69
Internet Addiction	1.00	5.00	2.73	0.82	0.34	0.52	.89

As presented in Table 2, the skewness values of the measurement instruments ranged within ± 3.00 , while kurtosis values ranged within ± 10.00 . These findings indicate that the data were normally distributed (Kline, 2015). Accordingly, the measurement instruments were considered to meet the assumption of normality.

Furthermore, the reliability coefficients ranged between .69 and .89. Previous studies suggest that reliability coefficients of .70 and above indicate high reliability (Salvucci et al., 1997), whereas values between .60 and .70 represent acceptable reliability levels (Griethuijsen et al., 2014). Therefore, the reliability values obtained from the measurement instruments used in this study were considered generally acceptable to high levels.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was structured in accordance with the purpose of the study. First, descriptive statistics were calculated, and skewness and kurtosis values were examined to evaluate

data distribution. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the reliability of the measurement instruments. Structural equation modeling was employed to examine the mediation effects, which constituted the primary focus of the study. Data analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 25 and Jamovi Version 2.6.13. Within the scope of this study, a mediation model was applied to determine the mediating role of behavioral problems in the relationship between adolescents' internalizing problems and internet addiction. In evaluating the model, indirect effects were interpreted based on 95% confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). To test the significance of indirect effects, the bootstrapping method with 10,000 bootstrap samples was employed.

Findings

Initially, the relationships among the study variables were examined, and the findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Correlations among variables

Variables	Internalizing Problems	Behavioral Problems
Internalizing Problems	--	
Behavioral Problems	.49**	--
Internet Addiction	.21*	.35**

**p < .001; *p < .05.

As shown in Table 3, statistically significant relationships were identified among the variables included in the study. Internet addiction was found to be positively and weakly associated with both internalizing problems and behavioral problems.

Within the scope of the study, correlations among the variables were first examined, followed by analyses conducted to test the proposed hypotheses. In this context, the mediating role of behavioral problems in the relationship between adolescents' internalizing problems and internet addiction was investigated. The results of the analyses are presented in Table 4 and were evaluated in detail to determine the validity of the mediation model and the proposed hypotheses.

Table 4

Mediation Analysis

Path	Effect	b	%95 Confidence Interval		β	p-value
			Lower	Upper		
Indirect	Internalizing* $\Rightarrow$ Behavioral** $\Rightarrow$ IA***	0.37	0.21	0.53	.16	<.001
	Internalizing $\Rightarrow$ Behavioral	0.51	0.40	0.62	.49	<.001
Direct	Behavioral $\Rightarrow$ IA	0.72	0.44	0.99	.33	<.001
	Internalizing $\Rightarrow$ IA	0.11	-0.18	0.41	.05	0.457
Total	Internalizing $\Rightarrow$ IA	0.48	0.21	0.75	.21	<.001

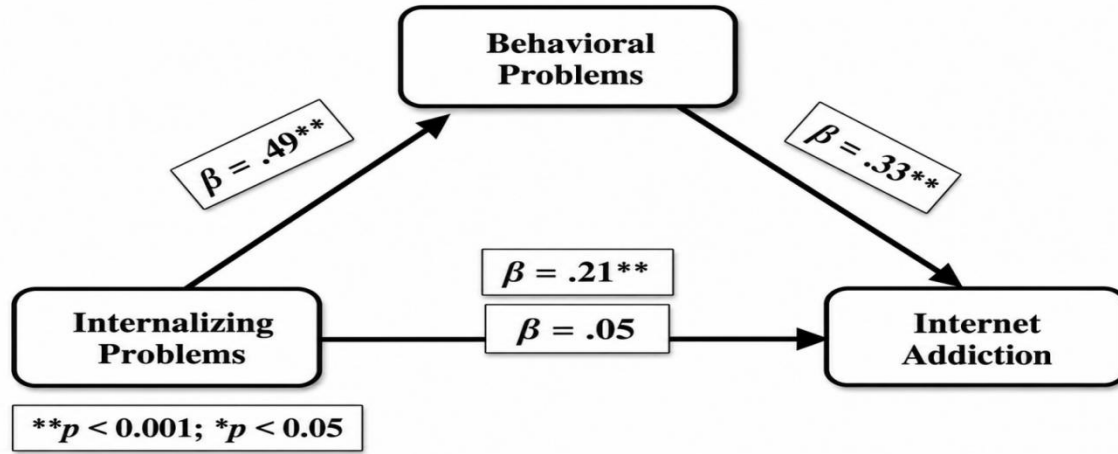
*Internalizing Problems, **Behavioral Problems, ***Internet Addiction

As presented in Table 4, the direct effect of adolescents' internalizing problems on internet addiction was found to be statistically significant (total effect, $\beta = .21, p < .05$). Internalizing problems were also identified as a positive predictor of behavioral problems (direct effect, $\beta = .49, p < .001$). Furthermore, behavioral problems significantly and positively predicted internet addiction (direct effect, $\beta = .33, p < .05$).

Figure 1

Tested Mediation Model

When the mediator variable (behavioral problems) was included in the model, the direct effect of



internalizing problems on internet addiction became statistically non-significant (direct effect, $\beta = .05, p > .05$). Accordingly, internalizing problems were found to exert an indirect effect on internet addiction through behavioral problems (indirect effect, $\beta = .16, p < .05$). The graphical representation of the tested mediation model is presented in Figure 1.

As illustrated in Figure 1, internalizing problems appear to influence internet addiction indirectly by significantly increasing behavioral problems rather than directly affecting internet addiction. This finding suggests that behavioral problems play a full mediating role in the relationship between internalizing problems and internet addiction.

Discussion And Conclusion

This research employed structural equation modeling to examine how internalizing problems influence internet addiction (IA) in adolescents, as well as to explore whether behavioral problems mediate this relationship. All hypotheses were supported, and the results showed that behavioral problems functioned as a full mediator between internalizing problems and IA. These findings suggest that internet addiction is not merely a matter of excessive or problematic technology use; rather, it should be understood as a multidimensional maladjustment issue connected to both emotional and behavioral factors. Consequently, early identification and management of behavioral problems in adolescents may be a key component of prevention strategies aimed at lowering IA risk.

A key result was that internalizing problems—specifically depression, anxiety, and loneliness—served as a significant positive predictor of internet addiction ($\beta = .21, p < .05$). This aligns with the widely cited "emotion regulation strategy" perspective, which holds that adolescents

who perceive themselves as socially incompetent or who experience emotional distress often turn to the internet as a "safe haven." The anonymous and controllable nature of online environments allows them to escape negative emotions (Caplan, 2003; McKenna et al., 2002). Moreover, because the prefrontal cortex—responsible for impulse control and decision-making—is still maturing during adolescence, young people may be especially susceptible to the immediate rewards offered by internet use (Brand et al., 2014).

The most striking finding emerged from the mediation analysis. Once behavioral problems (e.g., aggression, rule-breaking) were entered into the model, the direct path from internalizing problems to IA became statistically insignificant ($\beta = .05$, $p = .457$). This suggests that adolescents suffering from internal distress do not typically progress directly to addiction. Instead, they may first externalize their distress through various behavioral difficulties, and these maladaptive patterns may then pave the way toward IA. This sequence of events can be understood through Jessor's (1987) Problem Behavior Theory, which argues that different risky behaviors—including aggression and internet addiction—share overlapping psychosocial roots and tend to co-occur (De Leo & Wulfert, 2013; Sung et al., 2013). Adolescents who have trouble managing internal stress often react impulsively, leading to conflicts within their families, schools, and peer groups. As a result of these social struggles and feelings of exclusion, they may turn to online spaces in an effort to compensate for unmet needs such as autonomy and relatedness (Akbari et al., 2023; Yang & Zhu, 2023).

Furthermore, behavioral problems were found to be a strong positive predictor of internet addiction ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$). This finding is consistent with prior research showing that low self-control and impulsivity are common risk factors underlying both behavioral disorders and technology-related addictions (Gentile et al., 2011; Ko et al., 2009). In particular, involvement in cyberbullying or violent video games may reinforce existing aggressive tendencies in adolescents, thereby perpetuating and deepening the addiction cycle (Holtz & Appel, 2011; Weeks et al., 2016).

Recommendations

Drawing from the results of this study, a number of practical suggestions can be put forward. These suggestions are derived directly from the study's findings, with supporting literature used primarily to reinforce those findings.

The results indicated that the link between internalizing problems and internet addiction operates through behavioral problems. Consequently, intervention strategies that focus exclusively on limiting online time are unlikely to prove adequate. More specifically, comprehensive psychosocial programs that target both internalizing difficulties (e.g., depression, anxiety) and externalizing difficulties (e.g., aggression, impulsivity) are needed to keep internal distress from turning into behavioral dysregulation. As noted in earlier research (Effatpanah et al., 2020; Gu et al., 2023), such an approach acknowledges the tendency for risky behaviors to cluster together.

The study also showed that behavioral problems directly and strongly predicted internet addiction ($\beta = .33$), whereas internalizing problems had only an indirect effect via behavioral problems. In light of this, educational initiatives designed to enhance anger management, emotional regulation, and problem-solving abilities should be reinforced. These skills can help adolescents to cope with internal distress without resorting to maladaptive behavioral outlets. Strengthening such skills may act as a protective factor that reduces the mediating influence of behavioral problems.

The findings revealed that behavioral problems serve as a key intermediate variable on the path to internet addiction. This implies that adolescents' interactions with their environment-particularly within the family and among peers -play an important role in shaping this process. Therefore, expanding awareness campaigns that help parents recognize early emotional and behavioral signs and strengthening efforts to improve parent-child communication may contribute to the early identification and prevention of internet addiction. Consistent with prior literature (Ang et al., 2012; Yang & Zhu, 2023), family-oriented approaches of this kind may fulfill a protective function.

The results further demonstrated that behavioral problems represent a significant step in the development of internet addiction. Accordingly, it is important to provide more structured opportunities that allow adolescents to channel their behavioral energy and social needs in constructive directions. Encouraging participation in sports, the arts, and community service projects may lower the incidence of behavioral problems while also limiting the tendency to use the internet as an escape. This recommendation aligns with the need-satisfaction perspective highlighted by Gu et al. (2023).

The present study examined the relationships among internalizing problems, behavioral problems, and internet addiction using a cross-sectional design. Although the results demonstrated that behavioral problems fully mediated these relationships, the model does not account for how this process unfolds over time. Thus, future investigations should adopt longitudinal designs to more clearly establish the direction and developmental course of causal relationships among these variables (Anderson et al., 2017).

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Geniş Özet

Giriş

Bu araştırmanın temel amacı, ergenlerde içselleştirme problemleri (depresyon, anksiyete, sosyal geri çekilme, yalnızlık gibi bireyin sıkıntılarını içe yönelttiği duygusal sorunlar) ile internet bağımlılığı arasındaki ilişkide davranış problemlerinin (saldırganlık, dürtüsellik, kural ihlali gibi dışa yönelimli sorunlar) aracı rolünü yapısal eşitlik modeli çerçevesinde incelemektir. Dijitalleşmenin hız kazandığı günümüzde ergenler için internet, kimlik gelişimi, sosyalleşme ve boş zaman değerlendirme gibi temel işlevler üstlenen bir yaşam alanına dönüşmüştür. Ancak kontrolsüz ve aşırı internet kullanımı, patolojik kumar oynama ölçütlerine benzer belirtilerle

tanımlanan internet bağımlılığı sorununu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Ergenlik döneminin biyolojik, psikolojik ve sosyal değişimlerin yoğun yaşandığı kritik bir evre olması, dürtü kontrolündeki zayıflıklar ve prefrontal korteksin tam olgunlaşmamış olması, ergenleri internetin sunduğu hızlı ödül sistemlerine karşı daha duyarlı hale getirmektedir.

Yöntem

Araştırma, betimsel yöntemlerden yordayıcı korelasyonel model çerçevesinde yürütülmüştür. Örneklem, uygun örnekleme tekniğiyle seçilen yaşları 14 ile 17 ve üzeri arasında değişen toplam 272 ergenden oluşmaktadır. Katılımcıların %54.8'i kadın, %45.2'si erkektir. Sınıf düzeyi dağılımında en fazla %34.9 ile 9. sınıf öğrencileri yer alırken, sosyoekonomik alçada çoğunluk (%35.7) kendini orta düzey olarak tanımlamıştır. Veri toplama araçları olarak, Goodman (1997) tarafından geliştirilen ve Güvenir ve arkadaşları (2008) tarafından Türkçeye uyarlanan "Güçler ve Güçlükler Anketi (GGA/SDQ-Tur)" ile Young tarafından geliştirilip Kutlu ve arkadaşları (2016) tarafından Türkçeye uyarlanan "Young İnternet Bağımlılığı Ölçeği Kısa Formu (YİBÖ-KF)" kullanılmıştır. GGA, bazıları olumlu bazıları olumsuz davranış özelliklerini değerlendiren 25 maddeden oluşmaktadır. Ölçek, davranış sorunları; dikkat eksikliği ve aşırı hareketlilik; duygusal sorunlar; akran sorunları ve sosyal davranışlar olmak üzere beş alt boyuttan oluşmaktadır. Her alt boyut ayrı ayrı değerlendirilebilmektedir. Bununla beraber, ilk dört alt boyutun toplamı toplam güçlük puanını vermektedir.

Bulgular

Ölçeklerin Cronbach alfa güvenirlik katsayıları .69 ile .89 arasında değişmekte olup, çarpıklık ve basıklık değerleri normal dağılım varsayımını karşılamaktadır. Veri analizinde, değişkenler arasındaki karmaşık etkileşimi belirlemek amacıyla aracılık modeli (mediation model) uygulanmış ve dolaylı etkilerin anlamlılığını test etmek için 10.000 bootstrap örnekleme kullanılmıştır. Araştırma bulguları, içselleştirme problemlerinin internet bağımlılığını ($\beta = .21, p < .05$) ve davranış problemlerini ($\beta = .49, p < .001$) anlamlı ve pozitif yönde yordadığını göstermiştir. Davranış problemlerinin internet bağımlılığı üzerindeki etkisi incelendiğinde, bunun güçlü bir pozitif yordayıcı olduğu tespit edilmiştir ($\beta = .33, p < .001$). En çarpıcı bulgu aracılık analizinden elde edilmiştir: İçselleştirme problemlerinin internet bağımlılığı üzerindeki toplam etkisi anlamlıyken ($\beta = .21$), davranış problemleri aracı değişken olarak modele dahil edildiğinde doğrudan etki anlamsız hale gelmiş ($\beta = .05, p = .457$), buna karşın dolaylı etki anlamlı bulunmuştur ($\beta = .16, \%95 \text{ GA } [0.21, 0.53]$). Bu sonuç, davranış problemlerinin içselleştirme problemleri ile internet bağımlılığı arasında "tam aracı" (full mediation) bir rol üstlendiğini kanıtlamaktadır.

Sonuç ve Tartışma

Araştırma bulguları, içsel sıkıntı yaşayan ergenlerin doğrudan internet bağımlılığına yönelmek yerine, öncelikle bu stresi dışı vurarak davranış problemleri sergileyebileceklerini; bu davranışsal bozulmaların ise onları sanal dünyaya kaçışa yöneltebileceğini düşündürmektedir. Bu süreç, Problem Davranış Kuramı (Jessor, 1987) ve Telafi Edici Kullanım Modeli ile açıklanabilir. Çalışma, ergenlerde internet bağımlılığıyla mücadelede yalnızca ekran süresini sınırlamaya odaklanan müdahalelerin yetersiz kalacağını; duygu düzenleme, öfke kontrolü ve problem çözme becerilerini geliştirmeye yönelik bütüncül psikososyal programların gerekliliğini vurgulamaktadır. Ayrıca ebeveyn-çocuk iletişiminin güçlendirilmesi ve ergenlerin spor, sanat gibi yapılandırılmış etkinliklere yönlendirilmesi önerilmektedir. Gelecek araştırmalar için nedensel ilişkilerin yönünü belirleyebilecek boylamsal desenlerin kullanılması önerilmektedir.