The Relationship Between Problematic Internet Use and Family Resilience with Risky Behaviors in High School Students in Sari City

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed to examine the relationship between problematic internet use and family resilience with risky behaviors among second-grade high school students in Sari City.

Methods and Materials: The research employed a descriptive correlational design. The statistical population consisted of all 1,670 tenth-grade male students enrolled in public high schools in Sari City during the 2022–2023 academic year. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan table and through overestimation, a sample of 325 students was selected using a two-stage cluster sampling method. Data were collected using three questionnaires: the Risky Behaviors Tendency Questionnaire developed by Zadeh Mohammadi and Ahmadabadi (2008), the Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire by Thatcher (2005), and the Family Resilience Questionnaire by Sixbey (2005). Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and stepwise regression methods.

Findings: The findings indicated that there is a significant negative correlation at the 0.01 level between family resilience and students' risky behaviors. Furthermore, a significant positive correlation at the 0.01 level was found between problematic internet use and students' risky behaviors. Both family resilience and problematic internet use significantly predicted students' risky behaviors.

Conclusion: These results offer practical implications for psychologists and counselors in improving risky behaviors by considering the impact of family resilience and problematic internet use.

Keywords: Family resilience, problematic internet use, risky behaviors.

1.   Introduction

Risky behaviors increase the likelihood of negative psychological, social, and even physical consequences (Gansner et al., 2019). On the other hand, the prevalence of high-risk behaviors, particularly among adolescents and youth, has become one of the most common and significant concerns of societies (Arab Nezad et al., 2018). Adolescence and late youth are developmental stages characterized by psychological, social, and especially physical changes (Ghorbani & Khosravi, 2017). Due to adolescents' egocentrism and their lack of accurate understanding of their behaviors, this stage is considered critical for the initiation of risky behaviors (McCauley et al., 2018). The tendency of these individuals toward high-risk behaviors is a major source of societal concern (Vannucci et al., 2020), as those more prone to such behaviors tend to have lower levels of psychological and social well-being and reduced academic achievement (Alizadeh et al., 2020). The prevalence of risky behaviors has been steadily increasing among youth since 1990 (Atadokht et al., 2013). It is projected that by 2030, the rate of disease and mortality caused by risky behaviors among young people will reach eight million deaths per year (Gansner et al., 2019). When considering psychological, social, and physical risky behaviors such as substance abuse, violence, and conflict, the potential harm becomes even more pronounced (Atadokht et al., 2013). In Iran, risky behaviors include the prevalence of smoking, hookah use, alcohol, and drug consumption among individuals aged 14 to 19 years (Niazi & Shadfar, 2011). Engaging in one risky behavior may lead individuals toward other forms of high-risk actions (Reynolds et al., 2019), thus increasing the likelihood of self-harm, victimization by others, and other negative consequences (Pellerone et al., 2019). Interpersonal factors within the family, peer relationships, school environment, and certain social behaviors, such as engagement in social networks and the internet, are crucial in influencing individuals' tendency toward risky behaviors (Chaghousaz et al., 2020).

The widespread use and appeal of the internet in recent years has led to a phenomenon known as internet addiction or, more precisely, problematic internet use (Pettorruso et al., 2020). Unfortunately, the harmful use of this tool has led to neglect of family relationships, breakdown of social connections, academic decline, occupational problems, and many other issues (Abbasi Shavazi et al., 2018). Adolescents and young adults are increasingly gaining access to the internet and are more exposed to its dangers than other age groups (Yamada et al., 2021). These individuals attempt to control their behaviors, take responsibility for their actions, and may even be willing to accept responsibility for others' actions (Mohseni Tabrizi & Hoveida, 2014). At this age, they experience an internal conflict: on one hand, they resist acting beyond their age, while on the other, they desire autonomy and responsibility (Ghorbani & Khosravi, 2017). In Iran, due to the lack of commercial and economic applications, the internet is mainly a space with cultural, social, and political content. New technologies like the internet affect social relationships and contribute to increased introversion and detachment from family and society (Rahimi & Zarei Mahmoudabadi, 2017).

In this context, one of the influential factors in shaping children's behavior is the communicative and interactive style within the family environment (Gregersen et al., 2022). Cognitive, behavioral, and emotional patterns formed in coping strategies are effective in how individuals deal with problems (Gallagher & Miller, 2018). Factors such as stubbornness and family resilience play a key role in behavioral responses in various situations (Christiani et al., 2019). Resilience is defined as the ability to return to an initial balance or to reach a higher level of equilibrium under threatening conditions, thereby enabling successful adaptation in life (Chaghousaz et al., 2020). In the realm of resilience, two categories can be distinguished: risk factors and protective factors. Risk factors hinder effective functioning (Mirzaei et al., 2021), whereas protective factors are resources that help individuals mitigate the impact of adversity and crises by emphasizing the importance of family (Uddin et al., 2020). Family resilience refers to the preservation of core family functions and the capacity to repair and rebuild after crises, as well as to promote growth and development (Javadi Bora, 2019). In this process, three key capacities—absorption or resistance, adjustment or adaptation, and transformation—are considered along with a range of social, cultural, economic, educational, and genetic factors (Kiani & Arefi, 2015).

Zolnowri et al. (2022) concluded that there is a significant negative relationship between total psychological resilience scores and components such as personal competence, trust in instincts, acceptance of change, control, and spiritual influences with the tendency toward risky behaviors in working children (Zolnowri & Haghparast Lati, 2022). Karami and Taklouei (2021) demonstrated a significant relationship between virtual space addiction and parental marital satisfaction with the tendency toward risky behaviors

among students (Karami & Taklavi, 2021). Gregersen et al. (2022) indicated that psychological disorders in children before adolescence exposed to risky behaviors may stem from functional resilience problems in their family environments (Gregersen et al., 2022). Yamada et al. (2021) showed that pathological internet use and risky behaviors were not uncommon among elementary school students. In addition to unhealthy lifestyles, family and social environments were also associated with pathological internet use. Effective deterrents to pathological internet use include strong child-parent interaction and helping children build close real-life friendships (Yamada et al., 2021).

On the whole, a review of existing research on problematic internet use and the family's role, along with the analysis of influencing factors in this area, suggests that the root causes largely stem from the challenges faced by adolescents and youth. The literature also highlights the role of socio-cultural factors in this domain, but studies remain limited and occasionally contradictory. Therefore, the central question of this study is: Can problematic internet use and family resilience predict risky behaviors?

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study, in terms of its objective, is classified as applied research. Regarding the method of data collection, it was cross-sectional, and the data analysis was conducted using a descriptive correlational approach. The statistical population of the present study consisted of all 1,670 tenth-grade male high school students in Sari City during the 2022–2023 academic year. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan table and using an overestimated sample size, 325 students were selected through two-stage cluster sampling. In the first stage, 10 public schools were selected from among the 14 existing ones, and in the second stage, 13 classrooms were randomly selected from a total of 40 classes with 25 students each.

To determine the inclusion criteria, the status of each individual was assessed. The research objectives were explained, and the questionnaires were distributed and collected over four weeks. Participation in the study was voluntary. To uphold ethical research standards, ensure respect for participants, and protect their welfare, all study conditions and a brief overview of the research objectives were presented implicitly, and instructions for responding to the items were explained clearly.

2.2. Measures

Zadehmohammadi and Ahmadabadi's Risky Behavior Tendency Questionnaire (2008): This questionnaire measures adolescents' tendency toward risky behaviors, including dangerous driving (items 1–6), violence (7–11), cigarette smoking (12–16), drug use (17–24), alcohol consumption (25–30), opposite-sex friendships (31–34), and sexual behaviors (35–38). The questionnaire contains 38 items, and respondents indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" (=5) to "Strongly Disagree" (=1). It provides a total score ranging from 38 to 190, where a higher score indicates a stronger tendency toward risky behaviors. Construct and content validity were confirmed by the developers, and Cronbach's alpha was reported as 0.82. In the present study, construct validity was verified for the adolescent population, and Cronbach's alpha was calculated at 0.74.

Thatcher's Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire (2005): Developed by Thatcher et al. in 2005 with 20 items, this questionnaire was revised in 2014 by Ranjbar and Thatcher. It includes four factors: preoccupation (items 1, 2, 6, 10), withdrawal behaviors (items 5, 9, 15, 16, 19, 20), negative consequences (items 4, 7, 11, 12, 17, 18), and escape from reality (items 3, 8, 13, 14). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating more severe problematic internet use. A score above 70 suggests high risk, 40–69 indicates moderate risk, and scores below 40 imply low risk or non-problematic use. Construct and content validity were confirmed by the developers, and Cronbach's alpha was reported as 0.80.

Sixbey's Family Resilience Questionnaire (2005): Originally designed by Sixbey with 66 items, this questionnaire was adapted for Iranian norms by Hosseini and Hossein Chari (2013), reducing the number of items to 55. It includes three subscales: communication and problem-solving (items 17, 21–26, 29–36, 38–39, 42–44, 46–47, 51–53, 58–60, 63–66), religious/social resources (items 18–20, 27, 37, 40–41, 45, 49–50, 54–56, 61), and acceptance of difficulties (items 1–8, 12). It uses a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (=1) to "Strongly Agree" (=4). The minimum score is 55, and the maximum is 220. A higher score indicates a higher level of family resilience, while a lower score suggests low resilience. The original developers confirmed its construct and content validity, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.85 to 0.96. In the Iranian validation, construct and content validity were affirmed, and Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.76 to 0.93.

2.3. Intervention

The Kindness Behavior Training (KBT) program was developed with the goal of supporting and expanding mindfulness and cultivating kindness behaviors as a complementary approach to mindfulness-based interventions. The program incorporates three core components of mindfulness practice: expanding awareness, learning to accept and cope with distressing experiences, and making conscious, informed choices based on enhanced awareness. The KBT program consists of two mindfulness sessions, six kindness-focused sessions, and one integrative session combining kindness and mindfulness relaxation. These sessions were delivered weekly to the experimental group over a 90-minute period each.

The intervention protocol consisted of nine structured sessions, including an initial screening (Pre-Session) and eight therapeutic sessions, designed based on Kindness Behavior Training (KBT) principles to promote self-regulation and interpersonal communication in depressed individuals with substance use disorder. In Pre-Session, the target group was selected based on the Beck Depression Inventory, initial kindness assessment, and interpersonal and self-regulation skills questionnaires. Session 1 focused on acknowledging human suffering and recognizing the distress caused by substance use, using mindfulness, breathing exercises, and meaningful reflections. Session 2 addressed how individuals intensify their own suffering by introducing maladaptive coping mechanisms and temptations, guiding participants to identify personal triggers and practice mindful awareness. Session 3 emphasized the impermanence of suffering, encouraging acceptance of change and self-growth through life reflection and emotional

awareness. Session 4 deepened participants' motivation for recovery by exploring self-compassion, gratitude, and empathy, including exercises for cost-benefit analysis of substance use and recovery. Session 5 explored the transformation of thoughts, behaviors, and social interactions by linking behavior to outcomes, promoting moderation, and practicing forgiveness and self-accountability. Session 6 centered on internal values by engaging in imagery and identifying supportive versus hindering individuals in recovery. Session 7 focused on sustaining recovery through self-compassion after relapse, identifying barriers, and preserving constructive emotional states. Finally, Session 8 encouraged participants to help others by sharing their gains and reflecting on previous steps to promote mutual support and continued healing.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation and stepwise regression, via SPSS version 26.

3.   Findings and Results

The results in the table below indicate a significant correlation between problematic internet use and risky behaviors among second-grade high school students in Sari City. Specifically, a positive and significant correlation of .28 was observed between problematic internet use and risky behaviors. Since a higher score on the problematic internet use questionnaire indicates a worse condition, and similarly, a higher score on the risky behaviors questionnaire also reflects a more severe condition, this result is logically consistent.

Table 1

Pearson Correlation Matrix Between Problematic Internet Use and Risky Behaviors Among Second-Grade High School Students in Sari City

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Preoccupation	1												
2. Withdrawal Behaviors	.71	1											
3. Negative Consequences	.69	.66	1										
4. Escape from Reality	.77	.71	.72	1									
5. Problematic Internet Use	.83	.75	.78	.81	1								
6. Dangerous Driving	.18	.16	.19	.16	.26	1							
7. Violence	.15	*.13*	.21	.20	.25	.74	1						
8. Cigarette Smoking	.19	*.13*	.20	.21	.21	.71	.74	1					
9. Drug Use	*.13*	.15	.17	.17	.24	.55	.69	.74	1				
10. Alcohol Use	.15	.18	.19	.19	.25	.62	.78	.76	.72	1			
11. Opposite-Sex Friendships	.17	.16	.20	.21	.22	.70	.72	.78	.79	.77	1		
12. Sexual Behavior	.20	*.14*	.18	.19	.25	.73	.68	.81	.72	.73	.70	1	
13. Risky Behaviors (Total)	.25	.20	.24	.22	.28	.78	.85	.86	.83	.81	.75	.78	1
Mean	12.4	14.3	13.8	15.1	56.9	8.7	9.3	7.5	6.2	5.9	10.4	9.7	92.6
SD	3.5	4.1	4.0	3.8	10.7	2.9	3.1	2.5					

The results in the table below show a significant negative correlation between family resilience and risky behaviors among second-grade high school students in Sari City. Specifically, there is a significant negative correlation of –.32 between family resilience and risky behaviors. Since a higher score in family resilience indicates a better condition and a higher score in risky behaviors indicates a worse condition, the result is logically consistent.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Matrix Between Family Resilience and Risky Behaviors Among Second-Grade High School Students in Sari City

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Communication & Problem Solving	1												
2. Religious/Social Resources	.75	1											
3. Acceptance of Difficulties	.68	.69	1										
4. Family Resilience (Total)	.84	.81	.77	1									
5. Problematic Internet Use	–.21	–.23	–.24	–.23	1								
6. Dangerous Driving	–.19	–.19	–.26	–.26	.25	1							
7. Violence	–.22	–.22	–.21	–.27	.25	.74	1						
8. Cigarette Smoking	–.18	–.21	–.26	–.21	.25	.71	.74	1					
9. Drug Use	–.23	–.19	–.22	–.26	.25	.55	.69	.74	1				
10. Alcohol Use	–.25	–.22	–.20	–.29	.25	.62	.78	.76	.72	1			
11. Opposite-Sex Friendships	–.22	–.19	–.27	–.27	.25	.70	.72	.78	.79	.77	1		
12. Sexual Behavior	–.24	–.21	–.25	–.25	.25	.73	.68	.81	.72	.73	.70	1	
13. Risky Behaviors (Total)	–.27	–.25	–.29	–.32	.28	.78	.85	.86	.83	.81	.75	.78	1
Mean	86.3	62.7	57.5	206.5	56.9	8.7	9.3	7.5	6.2	5.9	10.4	9.7	92.6
SD	12.1	11.8	10.4	28.3	10.7	2.9	3.1	2.5					

The ANOVA results in the table below indicate that the predictive paths for risky behaviors based on family resilience and problematic internet use are statistically significant at the .01 level.

Table 3

Summary of ANOVA Results for Predicting Risky Behaviors (Criterion Variable) Based on Family Resilience and Problematic Internet Use

(Predictor Variables)

Predictor Variable	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance
Family Resilience	Regression	5169.435	1	5169.435	342.868	.000
	Residual	4870.166	323	15.077		
	Total	6239.546	324			
Problematic Internet Use	Regression	5589.778	2	2794.889	193.244	.000
	Residual	4657.098	322	14.463		
	Total	6239.546	324			

4.   Discussion and Conclusion

Individuals who demonstrate problematic internet use typically exhibit poorer interpersonal adjustment and emotional instability. In many cases, access to the internet serves as a mechanism to suppress anxiety and life stress. From a practical standpoint, problematic internet use is associated with significant social, psychological, and emotional consequences that can impact occupational functioning and lifestyle, rendering the behavior itself a form of risky conduct. Another interpretation of these findings suggests that the problematic internet usage patterns of individuals are shaped by behavioral-cognitive constructs within the family context, including specific interaction styles and modes of social cognition across different times and settings (Yamada et al., 2021). Individuals raised in families characterized by low control, conflict, and stress tend to express their emotions more openly and may engage less frequently in risky behaviors (Rahimi & Zarei Mahmoudabadi, 2017). These interpersonal dynamics are evident in the relationships of individuals dependent on virtual networks, where cohesive families exhibit strong ties across cognitive, behavioral, and particularly emotional domains.

Moreover, based on Hirschi's social control theory, the more individuals feel bound to societal norms and constraints and avoid taking risks, paradoxically, the more likely they are to engage in risky behavior (Mohseni Tabrizi

& Hoveida, 2014). According to this theory, disregarding social rules and perceiving oneself as autonomous and unrestrained may lead to social alienation and increased vulnerability to harmful behaviors. Regarding problematic internet use, Hiroshi's theory emphasizes attachment and emotional investment as buffers against social harm; individuals who lack strong emotional bonds with close friends and relatives are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors (Pettorruso et al., 2020). Accordingly, the amount of time and consistency of internet use significantly affects family relationships (Rahimi & Zarei Mahmoudabadi, 2017). As noted earlier, the more one uses the internet, the more familial interactions deteriorate, ultimately increasing the probability of risky behavior.

Family resilience, on the other hand, is a critical factor in fostering successful adaptation to stressful conditions. Families with high resilience tend to reduce members' feelings of hopelessness and loneliness. Individuals within such environments display greater tolerance for adversity, largely due to the social support embedded within the family structure. Their responses to problems are more peaceful and problem-focused, as they consistently rely on the protective role of their families, which in turn promotes psychological well-being (Gregersen et al., 2022). Additionally, family resilience, as a psychological capacity, enables members to collaboratively devise constructive coping strategies through mutual understanding and interaction. The family serves a key role in confronting daily life challenges and acts as a protective shield against risky behaviors. It fosters life satisfaction and facilitates effective adaptation among family members, improving behavioral outcomes and equipping individuals with the tools to manage adversity (Gallagher & Miller, 2018; Gansner et al., 2019).

Resilient families benefit from a combination of individual, social, and contextual protective factors that help them withstand challenges. These individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of flexibility and optimism in response to daily stressors and display an increased sense of internal control, which ultimately leads to positive outcomes in mental and physical health (Uddin et al., 2020). When protective psychological factors within the family outweigh risk factors, the likelihood of adaptive outcomes increases. Consequently, family members tend to demonstrate more flexible responses to difficulties and enjoy better psychological health (Christiani et al., 2019). Moreover, higher levels of family resilience enable individuals to draw upon greater positive emotional resources to counteract negative experiences and foster desirable states. This

resilience leads to enhanced psychological calm and life satisfaction, which—by mitigating the negative effects of stress on relationships—ultimately reduces engagement in risky behaviors.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the study and participated in the research with informed consent.

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