

# Internet usage preferences of children with problematic Internet use and their parent's knowledge and thoughts about children's Internet usage<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The unhealthy and irregular use of the Internet, which can be beneficial in many areas if used correctly, has become a growing problem. Problematic Internet use, which has become a global problem, is generally defined as a person's inability to control Internet use, leading to negative consequences in daily life (psychological issues, social isolation, communication problems, family problems, academic failure, low professional performance, etc.). These consequences of problematic Internet use may also be reasons that lead individuals to turn more to the Internet. Parents' Internet use knowledge and experience, family conflict, and low-income family relationships can influence children's Internet use preferences. In this direction, this study investigates children's preferences and thoughts about Internet use and parents' knowledge and thoughts about children's Internet use. A qualitative research method was used for the study. The required data for the research were obtained through a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers through face-to-face interviews. As a result of the study, when comparing parents' answers about the purposes of their children's Internet use, the importance they give to the Internet, the reasons for using the Internet, positive and negative effects of the Internet on daily life, it was found that some answers are similar, while some answers do not overlap. Specifically, children's responses regarding their communication with their parents and the extent to which they talk about the Internet and parents' responses regarding their communication with their children and the extent to which they talk about the Internet are different.



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## 1 Introduction

Today, the use of the Internet manifests itself in all areas. It is shown that the biggest reason for this is that today's conditions push people to use the Internet. Internet use, which has become a basic human need, has become one of the most controversial concepts today, both for its benefits and harms. Most people use the Internet as an efficient tool in their personal or professional lives because it offers considerable entertainment, personal and interpersonal communication, mass communication, and day-to-day management possibilities (Vural & Varol, 2019; Zhou et al., 2016). According to Caplan (2002), excessive Internet use refers to a quantity, or degree, of online activity that exceeds what a person thinks of as a standard, usual, or planned amount of time online and spending an excessive amount of time online is not necessarily indicative of a problem. Because many functional Internet behaviors require excessive time online (Caplan, 2002). However, in recent years, the number of people experiencing massive negative consequences in their lives because of Internet use has considerably grown (Zhou et al., 2016). The critical point here is how individuals use the Internet. Intention to use of Internet, frequency of Internet use, safety of Internet use, awareness of own rights and others' rights to use the Internet, and many other components are effective in evaluating Internet use as healthy or unhealthy. Therefore, Internet use is unhealthy when it negatively affects the individual's daily life and physical, emotional, and mental health, damages their social relationships with their environment, detaches them from reality, and makes them unrecognizable. In other words, using the Internet in this way is problematic Internet use (Onaral, 2020). In the context of this study, some definitions about the concept of 'problematic Internet use' have been examined. Problematic Internet use can be defined as Internet use that causes psychological, social, school, and/or work difficulties in a person's life, and it is the Internet version of addiction (Beard & Wolf, 2001). In another definition, problematic Internet use is generally defined as the inability to control one's Internet use, leading to negative daily life consequences (Spada, 2014). Shapira et al. (2000) defined problematic Internet use as engaging in Internet use that was uncontrollable, distressing, time-consuming, or resulted in negative outcomes. They also stated that it may be classified as impulse control disorder. All definitions of problematic Internet use mention that it breaks the individuals' daily routines and directs them to the virtual environment rather than daily life. In another definition, it is expressed as the individuals losing themselves the moment they use the Internet and feeling the desire not to leave that environment as they adapt to the environment on the Internet. An aspect emphasized in this definition is that problematic Internet use is similar to some psychological problems caused by the inability to control one's impulses. The starting point for this definition is that the Internet is seen as the only occupation in daily life; other activities are disturbed, and health integrity cannot be protected due to these disruptions. Commonalities in these definitions pointed out that some problems are not only related to Internet use but also to different situations and that these problems can influence each other (Shapira et al., 2003).

Another definition of problematic Internet use emphasizes the lack of control resulting from a lack of social acceptance and belonging in life, leading individuals to perform much less than they should in both social and professional life. Here, it is emphasized that harmful Internet use is something that individuals cannot control, and at the same time, the psychological reasons for problematic Internet use are also pointed out. This definition clearly emphasizes that individuals turn to the Internet because they cannot satisfy their psychological and social needs in the real world. In this context, it is concluded that problematic Internet use is a state of discomfort/disharmony in which individuals try to compensate for their needs, such as being

accepted, feeling valuable and free, maintaining contextually appropriate communication, coping with their anxieties, etc., which they lack in social life, by satisfying their needs in the virtual world (Caplan, 2003; Davis et al., 2002).

The effects and frequency of problematic Internet use are increasing today. Especially young people not only use the Internet for unhealthy and harmful purposes but also see it as part of their lives. This situation not only negatively affects their physical and mental health in daily life but can also weaken their relationships with their peers and especially with their families. Families negatively affected by this situation may take on a more conflictual and antagonistic role in their relationships with their children. The reasons include the family's desire to establish authority over the child, constantly criticizing the child's behavior, punishing the child by showing less love due to anger towards the child, setting stricter rules, not listening enough in the communication between the child and the parent and not talking about the problems, the child feeling that the child is under constant pressure are listed as factors that block the positive communication between the family and the child and increase problematic Internet use (Lukavska et al., 2020; Schneider et al., 2017). Families sometimes express their thoughts about their children with wrong behaviors and words. This wrong way of expression may cause the child to move away from the family and use the Internet more frequently and problematically. Adolescents' Internet use to escape problems can become much more than this over time. In the literature, in the definition of the concept of Internet addiction, which is a concept that is quite identified with the concept of problematic Internet but does not mean exactly the same thing, one of the reasons why adolescents use the Internet is expressed as the desire to get away from these problems.

Although both definitions are very close to each other, in Internet addiction, there is a need for a substance; in other words, there is a need for that substance. In problematic Internet use, there is unnecessary Internet use in addition to the frequency of use. There are many causes and consequences of problematic Internet use. The need to fill the emotional gaps of adolescents is one of these reasons and consequences. Adolescents prefer to use the Internet to not think about the negative emotional experiences they are exposed to in their environment or have experienced themselves (Günaydın et al., 2022). However, as they cannot fulfill their emotional needs and find solutions to their problems in this way, they cannot ensure their emotional competence and control. This is one of the most important causes and consequences of problematic Internet use. Existing studies on parental information about children's problematic Internet use tend to include information from a single parent. This study provides information on children's Internet use preferences and their thoughts about the Internet; it also provides data on the knowledge and thoughts of both parents of the child. In addition, considering the effect of communication within the family on problematic behaviors, it also contains important information focusing on the quality of parent-child communication in terms of children's problematic Internet use.

The data obtained from this study are also important in terms of revealing parents' knowledge and thoughts about their children's Internet use preferences, whether they share healthy information about Internet use with their children, and how much they know about their children's Internet use with their expressions.

As a result, problematic Internet use needs to be compared from the perspectives of parents and children. For this purpose, what are children's preferences and thoughts regarding Internet use? What are parents' knowledge and thoughts about children's Internet use? Are children's preferences and thoughts about Internet use similar to parents' knowledge and thoughts about

their children's Internet use? Answers to the questions were sought.

## 2 Method

### 2.1 Study design

In this study, a qualitative study design was used to allow individuals to convey their knowledge and experiences about the subject in their expressions, to convey their experiences as they are without interfering with their experiences, and to analyze all of this in detail (Büyüköztürk et al., 2018).

### 2.2 Study group

The research study group consists of 10 children aged 10-15 and their parents who applied to a private psychological counseling center between September 2022 and September 2023 due to problematic Internet use and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

### 2.3 Data collection tools

The study used an in-depth interview technique with semi-structured questions created by the researchers as a data collection tool. The suitability of the semi-structured questions for the research and the study group was assessed based on expert opinions. The in-depth interview technique is a research method that includes all dimensions of the researched subject, gives the individual the opportunity to explain the questions asked in detail, allows the researcher to obtain findings that can contribute to the study by asking the questions that happen to come to mind in the context of the interview, and allows the collection of information through one-on-one and face-to-face interviews that allow comprehensive answers to be obtained by asking mostly open-ended questions (Büyüköztürk et al., 2018; Tekin, 2006).

### 2.4 Data analysis

The content analysis method was used to analyze the data in the study. Content analysis ensures that the data obtained in the research is examined in great detail in every dimension. It aims to shape the data collected before the content analysis according to the purpose and goal of the research and make it unique. For this reason, content analysis itself comprises a series of phases. At the beginning of these phases, data with common characteristics are identified and categorized into specific classes. All data in these classes are analyzed and transformed into meaningful units containing considerations related to the research. These units should then be named, and the data they contain should be interpreted. This process ensures that the previously unexplored parts of the research are brought to light (Baltacı, 2017; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Maxwell, 2008; Pope et al., 2006). When analyzing the data obtained, codes, categories, and themes are gradually formed from the data to make them meaningful and consistent, and the data are interpreted by tabulation (Eisenbach & Köhler, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

During data coding, the collected data is reviewed and categorized. This process determines how the collected data should be evaluated, categorized, and named. This is how the data is classified (Kvale, 1994; Morse, 2016; Silverman, 2016).

The study's main theme was "Internet Use Preferences and Thoughts of Children with Problematic Internet Use and Parents' Knowledge and Thoughts about Their Children's Internet Use". The sub-themes were "Children's preferences and thoughts about Internet use", "Parents' knowledge and thoughts about children's Internet use", and "Similarity between children's

preferences and thoughts about Internet use and parents' knowledge and thoughts about their children's Internet use." Under these themes, categories were created with the questions asked to the participants, and codes were created with the answers given. The categories and codes are presented in the following order.

#### *2.4.1 Children's preferences and thoughts about Internet use*

In the category related to children's purposes of using the Internet, children reported learning software, making sales, watching videos/series/movies, chatting, research papers, preparing presentations, playing games, drawing on the screen, and creating games. In the category of reasons for spending time on the Internet, children reported unhealthy communication within the family, communicating with people on the Internet, distraction, getting away from the world, getting away from the boring home environment, interest in technology, wanting to get away from real life, having nothing else to do when bored.

In the category of the time spent by children on the Internet, children reported 1 hour, 2-4 hours, 4-5 hours, 5-6 hours, 2-3 hours during school time, 7-8 hours during school vacation. In the category of maximum time that children can spend without the Internet, children reported 1 day, never/do not know, 3 days, 1-2 weeks (if the child is taken away against his/her will).

The category related to the first person who provided them with Internet access, children stated mother, not remembering who provided the first access, and grandmother. In the category of talking to the parent about Internet use, children reported talking to the parent, not talking to the parent, parent-dominated conversation, and asking for help in an Internet-related situation (parent asking the child for help). In sharing information about what they do on the Internet, children stated that viewing pictures, watch TV series, listen to music, do research and homework, code, and virtual selling. In the category of what they know about their parents' Internet use, children reported that their parents are using the Internet for social media parents using the Internet for work, not knowing exactly why and how often parents use the Internet.

In the healthy Internet use definition category, children reported using within a certain period of time (use in moderation, use sparingly), staying away from inappropriate and negative content, not meaning anything, use as needed. In the category of positive effects of Internet use on daily life, children reported accessing materials related to the lessons (helping with homework, translation, research on the desired subject), distraction, boredom relief, socialization, and providing financial gain. In the category of negative effects of Internet use on daily life, children reported social and communication problems, negative emotional impact, attention and memory problems, behavioral problems, health problems (visual disorders, sleep disorders, eating disorders), addiction, conflict with parents, and unsafe Internet use.

In the category of the importance of spending time online, children reported very important, moderately important, no information on importance. In the activity category outside the Internet, children stated watching news and TV series with elders, playing with toys or siblings, studying, healthy activities (painting, reading, playing sports, spending time with friends), and not engaging in any activity. In the category of reflection on the lack of Internet, children reported greater sociability, more difficult access to lesson content, difficulty in learning, inability to imagine a situation without the Internet, inability to use music and navigation, inability to communicate by phone, greater achievement, risk of becoming depressed.

According to the children, phones, computers, and tablets are the most commonly used tools for

accessing the Internet.

#### ***2.4.2 Mothers' knowledge and thoughts about children's Internet use***

Mothers reported that it is very important, not very important in the category of the importance of their children attached to the Internet. In the category of the purposes for which children spend time on the Internet, they reported watching videos, playing games, using lesson content, spending time in communication and social media, and earning money.

Regarding how much time their children spend online, mothers stated that they spend 1-3 hours, 4-5 hours all day online if there is no school or lesson.

In the category of mothers communicating with their children about the Internet, mothers reported communication without conflict, communication with conflict, poor communication, and parent-dominated communication. And the category of mothers talking to their children about Internet use, mothers reported that the child does not share anything, he/she tells what he/she does on the Internet, the mother warns about using the Internet less, the mother provides information about healthy use of the Internet.

In the category of positive effects of the Internet on children, mothers stated that it facilitates the child's learning, has no positive impact, adapts easily to technology, meets people from different cultures, and improves the foreign language. In the negative effects of the Internet on children category, mothers stated that behavioral problems, self-regulation problems, communication problems, health problems (visual disorders, sleep disorders, eating disorders, distraction), emulation of negative examples, and addiction.

According to mothers, the tools that children most frequently use to access the Internet are phones, computers, and tablets.

#### ***2.4.3 Fathers' knowledge and thoughts about children's internet use***

Fathers reported that it was very important in the category of the importance of their children's attachment to the Internet; I do not know if the father was absent/did not participate. The category of purposes for which children spend time on the Internet, according to the fathers, include watching videos/series, playing games, father-absent/did not participate, and doing homework.

The category of how much time their children spend online according to fathers includes 1-3 hours, 3-4 hours, and fathers absent/did not participate.

In the category of fathers' communication with their children about the Internet, fathers reported limited communication, strong communication, fathers absence/not participation, and conflictual communication. Fathers talking to their children about Internet use include the child telling/explaining what he/she does on the Internet, the father warning the child about using the Internet less, the child not sharing anything, and the father being absent/not participating.

According to fathers, the category of positive effects of the Internet on children includes that the child learns about topics that interest him/her, has no positive impact, and the father is absent/did not participate. The category of negative effects of the Internet on children, according to fathers, includes behavioral problems, communication problems, self-regulation problems, addiction, and fathers absence/participation.

According to fathers, the tools that children most frequently use to access the Internet include

telephone, computer, and tablet, and the father is absent/did not participate.

#### ***2.4.4 Children's preferences and thoughts about Internet use and parents' knowledge and thoughts about their children's internet use***

The category of the importance of spending time online for children includes very important and moderately important, but did not provide information on the importance. According to the mothers, the category of the importance of the Internet for their children includes very important and not very important. According to the fathers, the importance of the Internet for their children includes very important things, such as no opinion and father absent/did not participate.

According to children's statements, Internet use purposes include learning software, making sales, watching videos/series/movies, chatting, researching paper, preparing presentations, playing games, drawing on the screen, and creating games. According to the mothers, the purposes of their child's frequent Internet use include watching videos, playing games, using it for lesson content, spending time on communication and social media, and earning money. According to the fathers, the purposes of their child's frequent Internet use include watching videos/series, playing games, doing homework, and father-absent/did not participate.

According to children's reports, the category of time spent by children on the Internet includes 1 hour, 2-4 hours, 4-5 hours, 5-6 hours, 2-3 hours during school time, 7-8 hours during school vacation. According to the mothers' statements, the time their child spends on the Internet includes 1-3 hours and 4-5 hours all day online if there is no school or lesson. According to the father's statements, the time their child spends on the Internet includes 1-3 hours or 3-4 hours when a father is absent/did not participate.

According to children, conversations with parents about Internet use include talking to the parent, not talking to the parent, parent-dominated conversation, and asking for help in an Internet-related situation (parent asking the child for help). According to mothers, conversations with the child about Internet use include the child not sharing anything, the child telling/explaining what he/she does on the Internet, the mother warning about using the Internet less, and the mother providing information about healthy Internet use. According to the father, conversations with the child about Internet use include the child telling/explaining what he/she does on the Internet, the father warning about using the Internet less, the child not sharing anything, and the father being absent/not participating.

According to the children, the positive effects of Internet use on daily life are accessing materials related to the lessons (helping with homework, translation, research on the desired subject), distraction, boredom, socialization, and financial gain. According to the mothers, the positive effects of the Internet on their children's daily lives are facilitating the child's learning, which has no positive impact, easy adaptation to technology, meeting people from different cultures, and improving foreign language. According to the fathers, the positive effects of the Internet on their children's daily lives are that the child learns about topics that interest him/her, has no positive impact, and the father is absent/does not participate.

According to the children, negative effects of Internet use on their daily lives are social and communication problems, negative emotional impact, attention and memory problems, behavioral problems, health problems (visual disorders, sleep disorders, eating disorders), addiction, conflict with parents, and unsafe Internet use. According to the mothers, the negative effects of Internet use on their children's daily lives are behavioral problems, self-regulation

problems, communication problems, and health problems (visual disorders, sleep disorders, eating disorders, distraction). According to the fathers, the category of negative effects of Internet use on children includes behavioral problems, communication problems, self-regulation problems, addiction, and father absence/participation.

According to the children's statements, the tools they use most frequently to access the Internet are phones, computers, and tablets. According to the mothers, the most frequently used tools by children to access the Internet are phones, computers, and tablets. According to the fathers, children's most frequently used tools to access the Internet include phones, tablets, computers, and no information.

### 3 Findings and interpretation

In this section, findings and interpretations related to children's preferences and thoughts about children's Internet use, parents' knowledge and thoughts about children's Internet use, and the comparison of children's preferences and thoughts about Internet use and parents' knowledge and thoughts about their children's Internet use are presented.

#### 3.1 Findings related to children's preferences and thoughts about internet use

When children were asked about the purpose of using the Internet, it was observed that children frequently answered "Playing games" (7) and "Watching videos/series/movies" (5). A boy's statement about the purpose of Internet use is as follows; "I use it to play games, chat, watch videos. I also make virtual sales there. I sell designs and stuff, and it distracts me. I use it to be separate from the world, to get away."

When the answers of the children regarding the reasons for spending time on the Internet frequently were analyzed, it was seen that 6 children answered "Having nothing else to do when bored", 5 children answered as "Unhealthy communication within the family", and 5 children answered as "Distraction, getting away from the world, getting away from the boring home environment". The remarkable statement of a boy about his reason for spending time on the Internet frequently is given below; "I love technology; it interests me a lot. My father also works in technology, so I am also curious. It also distracts me. It's like when adults drink when they are bored. They get drunk to escape from their troubles. I mean, it distracts you when there is trouble at home."

When children were asked about their time on the Internet, 4 children stated "2-4 hours," and 3 stated "4-5 hours". When asked about the maximum time they could spend without the Internet, 6 children answered, "None/I don't know." One girl's remarkable answer regarding the maximum time she can spend without the Internet is as follows; "1-2 weeks if it is taken away from me. Never on my own will."

Children frequently stated that their *mother* (7) was the first person to provide them with Internet access. A girl's statement about the person who first gave her access to the Internet is as follows: "I started when I was a baby. My mom gave it to me to keep me busy. I was like 3 years old".

When asked about the age at which they started using the Internet, most of the children answered "4-7 ages". A boy's statement about the age at which he started using the Internet is as follows: "I started at the age of 5-6. There was a program that made effects on the iPad, I started with it. The first word I already said was 'iPad' "

When the answers of the children about whether they talked to their parents about Internet use were evaluated, 7 children stated that they talked to their parents about Internet use, and 4



children stated that they did not. When the manner in which these conversations took place was analyzed, it was found that 5 of the children responded that the conversations were generally “*Parent-dominated conversations*”.

Children were asked what they shared with their parents about what they did on the Internet, and 4 children stated that they shared with their parents that they used the Internet for “*Viewing pictures*”, 3 children stated that they used the Internet for “*Watching TV series, listening to music*”, and 2 children stated that they used the Internet for “*Research and doing homework*”. A boy’s statement about sharing with his parents about what he does on the Internet is as follows: “*I try to share, I try to explain, but they don’t understand. I tell them about my virtual sales, they say only fine, okay*”.

When children were asked what they knew about their parents’ use of the Internet, 5 children said that they “*Did not know exactly why and how often their parents used the Internet*”. 4 children said that their parents use the Internet to “*Follow content*” and “*Play games.*”

When children’s definitions of healthy Internet use were analyzed, it was seen that the majority of the children responded “*Use within a certain period*” (7). Regarding the positive effects of Internet use on daily life, 9 children responded as “*Accessing materials related to lessons*”. Regarding the negative effects, 4 children answered “*Attention and memory problems,*” 3 children answered “*Health problems,*” and 3 children answered “*Addiction.*” A boy’s statement about healthy Internet use is “*Not using it enough to numb your brain, using it when you need it*”. A girl’s statement about the negative effects of Internet use on daily life: “*It spoils our health like a virus, hypnotizes us, spoils our eyes, they see our privacy. But, it is good for doing lessons*”.

In terms of the importance of spending time on the Internet, 6 children answered “*Very important,*” and 3 children answered “*Moderately important.*” An example of a boy’s answer about the importance of spending time on the Internet is, “*It is a part of my life. It distracts me*”.

When the answers of the children about the activities they do without the Internet were analyzed, it was seen that 5 children answered “*Healthy activities*” such as painting, reading books, doing sports, and spending time with friends, 3 children answered “*Studying*”, and 2 children answered “*Watching news and TV series with family elders*”.

When asked what would happen if there was no Internet, 5 of the children answered, “*Not being able to imagine/not knowing a situation without the Internet,*” and 3 children answered, “*More sociability.*” One boy’s answer regarding the situation without the Internet was as follows: “*I couldn’t even imagine it*”.

It was observed that “*Computer*” (8) and “*Telephone*” (7) were the most frequently used tools for Internet use by the children.

### **3.2 Findings related to mothers’ knowledge and thoughts about children’s internet usage**

According to the data of the mothers, 9 Mothers expressed the importance their children attach to the Internet as follows: “*Very important*”. 9 mothers stated that the purpose of children spending time on the Internet frequently is “*Playing games*”, and 5 mothers stated that the purpose of children spending time on the Internet is “*Watching videos*”. 4 mothers stated that how much time children spend on the Internet is “*On the Internet all day if there is no work, school or lesson*”, 5 mothers who stated that it is “*1-3 hours*”. 6 mothers stated that the most frequently used tools for

their children to access the Internet are *the telephone* and 4 mothers stated that *the computer*. One mother's statement regarding the importance of the Internet is as follows: "I don't see him at home. He goes crazy if his computer breaks down. It is very important. I think it is more important than me." Another mother's statement about the time children spend on the Internet: "It is tiring. He spends much time. He is always on the computer instead of talking to us. He spends 4-5 hours a day."

When the mothers were asked how their communication with their children was, 4 of the mothers expressed their communication with their children as "Weak communication", and 4 of them as "Communication in which the parent is dominant". One of the mother's statements about the communication with her child was as follows: "I think we can get along when we talk, but we don't talk. I think our communication is bad; it is sad".

When asked whether they talk to their children about the use of the Internet, 4 mothers answered "The child says/tells what he/she does on the Internet", and 4 mothers answered "The mother warns about using the Internet less", 3 mothers answered "To convey information about the healthy use of the Internet", and 2 mothers answered, "The child does not share anything".

When asked about the positive effects of the Internet on children, 5 mothers answered, "It has no positive effect," and 4 mothers answered, "It makes it easier for the child to learn."

5 Mothers stated the negative effects of the Internet on children as "Communication problems," 4 mothers who stated "Behavioural problems," 4 mothers who stated "Self-regulation problems," and 4 mothers who stated "Health problems." One of the mother's statements about the positive and negative effects of the Internet on children's lives is as follows: "Addiction is a negative effect; even when you use it for too long, your eyes bleed. On the positive side, it is good for the development of her English. She usually corresponds with her foreign friends on the Internet. She gets to know other countries. Her general culture increases."

### 3.3 Findings Related to fathers' knowledge and thoughts about children's Internet use

Fathers were asked about their thoughts on how important the Internet is for their children, and 7 fathers answered "Very important". One of the father's statements about the importance of the Internet for children is as follows: "It is so important that he thinks that he should spend time on the Internet when he is free. It is very, very important".

The purpose of their children spending time on the Internet frequently was stated as "Playing games" by 7 fathers and "Watching videos/series" by 3 fathers. When asked what is the most frequently used tool for their children to access the Internet, 5 fathers answered 'Telephone' and 2 fathers answered 'Computer'.

When asked about their communication with their children, 4 fathers expressed their communication with their children as "Strong communication" and 3 fathers as "Limited communication". An example of a father's statement about his communication with his child is "Sufficient and strong".

Regarding whether they talk to their children about the use of the Internet, 7 fathers answered, "The child says/tells what he/she does on the Internet," and 3 fathers answered, "The child does not share anything." One of the father's statements about talking to their children about Internet use was as follows: "Since there is an application on his phone, he sends permission requests. He tells what kind of game it is and what it can do".

When asked about the positive effects of the Internet on children, 7 fathers stated, *“It does not have any positive effects.”* Regarding the negative effects, 6 fathers reported *“Communication problems,”* and 4 fathers reported *“Self-regulation problems.”*

### 3.4 Findings related to the comparison of children’s preferences and thoughts about Internet use and parents’ knowledge and thoughts about their children’s Internet use.

When the importance of the Internet for children and parents’ thoughts about the importance of the Internet for children were compared, it was observed that 6 children stated that spending time on the Internet was *“Very important”* for them, 9 mothers stated that using the Internet was *“Very important”* for their children and 7 fathers stated that using the Internet was *“Very important”* for their children.

When the statements of children about the purpose of using the Internet were compared with the thoughts of mothers and fathers about the purpose for which children use the Internet, it was observed that both children (7), mothers (9), and fathers (7) mostly answered *“Playing games.”* Another answer given by the children was *“Watching videos/series/movies”* (5), while the mothers’ answer was *“Watching videos”* (5).

When the answers of the children about how much time they spend on the Internet and the thoughts of their parents on this subject were compared, it was observed that the children gave the most intense answers of *“2-4 hours”* (4) and *“4-5 hours”*, whereas the mothers gave the answers of *“1-3 hours”* (5) and *“If there is no school or lesson, they are on the Internet all day”* (4), and the fathers gave the answers of *“3-4 hours”* (4) and *“1-3 hours”* (4).

The statements of the children about what they talked about the Internet with their parents were analyzed by comparing the views of the parents about what the children talked about the Internet with them. It was observed that 7 children talked about Internet use with their parents, but the content of these conversations was generally in the form of *“Parent-dominated conversation”* (4). 8 of the mothers stated that they had a conversation with their child about Internet use, and it was found that these conversations were generally in the form of *“The mother’s warning to the child about using the Internet less”* (4) and *“The conversation in which the child told/explained what the child did on the Internet”* (4). Fathers stated that *there was a conversation between them and their children about the use of the Internet* (7), and the content of these conversations was determined to be in the form of *“The child tells/explains what he/she does on the Internet”* (7).

One of the boy’s statements about communication with his parents is as follows: *“I mean, good. I talk to my mother. My mother gets angry and complains a lot; sometimes, I think she does not understand me. She travels a lot for work. Sometimes there are arguments. Sometimes I think they do not understand me at all. I get confused, but it gets better. I am scared of my father, I am very afraid to talk to him. When I have something to say, generally I send him a text message.”*

A girl’s statement about her communication with her parents: *“It is moderately sweet. I have a mother who shouts all the time. She complains about everything, she is always unhappy. Our communication is not good. My mum is a very tiring person.”*

The statement of a mother regarding the communication she established with her child follows: *“We can not be alone. We talk when we are alone. I don’t like touching or being touched. After his brother was born, I moved away from him, yes, because of his brother’s illness, the attention*

always shifted to his brother. If he approaches me, his brother gets jealous, so he cannot approach me. I can't get angry because his brother is sick, but he has already grown up."

When the positive effects of the Internet in the daily life of children and the thoughts of parents about the positive effects of the Internet in the daily life of children were compared, it was seen that 9 children stated that the Internet had a positive effect in terms of "Accessing materials related to lessons" and 4 mothers stated that it had a positive effect in terms of "Facilitating the child's learning". On the other hand, 4 mothers stated, "It has no positive effect," and 7 fathers stated, "It has no positive effect." The statement of one of the girls regarding the positive and negative effects of the Internet on daily life is as follows: "It makes it easier for me to do my homework. It spoils our eyes. It is also bad to visit every website. We can see scary things and get scared".

When the negative effects of the Internet on children's daily lives and parents' thoughts on the negative effects of the Internet on children's daily lives are compared, it is seen that 4 children expressed the negative effects of the Internet on daily life as "Attention and memory problems", 5 mothers as "Communication problems", 4 mothers as "Health problems" and 6 fathers as "Communication problems".

When the responses regarding the most frequently used tool used by children to access the Internet were compared, 8 children answered "Computer", 7 children answered "Telephone" and 5 children answered "Tablet", while 6 mothers and 5 fathers answered "Telephone", 4 mothers and 2 fathers answered "Computer".

## 4 Discussion

In light of the findings obtained in this study, half of the children use the Internet for "watching videos/series/films" and more than half of them use it for "Playing games". Half of the children stated that they use the Internet for "Unhealthy communication within the family", "Boring home environment" and "Getting away from the world", and more than half of the children stated that they use the Internet for "Having nothing else to do". In the literature, it is stated that the fact that children in adolescence are introverted in their social lives and withdraw from their social lives contributes to their use of social media and the Internet (Akbari et al., 2023). In addition, parents' individual experiences, ethnicity, and thoughts can affect children's Internet use (Yıldırım Demirdöğen et al., 2024). In the study, it was concluded that almost all of the children used the Internet since the preschool period, the duration of Internet use of about half of them can reach up to a quarter of the 24 hours and the first person who provides Internet access to children is mostly their mothers. In the study conducted by Yıldırım Demirdöğen et al. (2024) with 508 adolescent children between the ages of 14-18, it was found that children's Internet usage times and social media addictions were parallel to each other, the majority of children's Internet usage time was "4-6" hours, and they started using social media "4-6 years" ago. In the study conducted by Büyükfiliz (2016), it was stated that problematic Internet use also increases as the duration of Internet use increases. The reason for this situation is that individuals who use the Internet problematically have difficulty staying away from the Internet and have difficulty in controlling time, in other words, they have self-control problems. In a study conducted by Yalçınkaya and colleagues (2023) with 380 adolescents between the ages of 12-15, it was concluded that as the time spent on the Internet increases, the individual tends to use the Internet more and needs to use the Internet and that the level of anxiety increases when he/she cannot meet the need for Internet use, which leads to negative situations. When the studies in the literature and this study are considered together, it can be said that as the time children spend on the Internet increases, their problematic Internet

use may increase, children may have difficulty in controlling their Internet use, and these situations have negative feedbacks on the child's daily life.

In this study, almost half of the children did not talk to their parents about Internet use. Children stated that their parents were dominant in talking about Internet use and that they talked more with their mothers about Internet use. The study conducted by Symons et al. (2017) concluded that children communicate with their mothers more than their fathers about Internet use. In this study, children expressed the negative effects of the Internet as "*Attention and memory problems,*" "*Health problems,*" and "*Addiction,*" respectively. Problematic use of the Internet negatively affects the communication between children and the individuals around them and can become a habit children cannot give up (Aral et al., 2019). The fact that children's Internet usage habits become uncontrollable over time, occupy a large part of daily life, and become uncomfortable when they cannot be accessed is described as Internet addiction (Öğretir Özçelik et al., 2021). When the studies on the negative effects of the Internet in the literature and this study are compared, it is seen that the negative effects of the Internet on children are mostly communication problems and the inability to adjust the time and frequency of Internet use. In the study, the children expressed the positive effects of the Internet as "*Accessing materials related to the lessons,*" "*Distraction,*" "*Boredom relief,*" "*Socializing,*" and "*Providing financial gain,*" respectively. Children also stated that they do healthy activities such as painting and reading books outside the Internet. Yüceliyiğit & Aral (2020) stated that the Internet allows children to learn to code and improve themselves by making three-dimensional designs. In the findings of this study, it was observed that about half of the mothers had weak communication with their children, and mothers were dominant in communication. Mothers tell their children to use the Internet at a certain level. Mothers said their children did not talk to them about using the Internet. Approximately half of the fathers stated that they had strong communication with their children and more than half of them said that their children talked to them about Internet use. Based on these statements, it can be said that about half of the mothers and fathers in this study have weak communication with their children, and this negatively affects the parents' knowledge levels and thoughts about their children's Internet use. Smartphones, which prevent parents from observing their children's Internet use, also increase this lack of knowledge (Imran et al., 2023). In a similar study on the subject, it was concluded that while mothers had information about the people with whom their children interacted on the Internet, they did not have information about the web addresses preferred by their children in Internet use, mothers did not have complete information about Internet use, fathers had higher levels of knowledge about children's Internet use than mothers, but they could not talk enough about Internet use with their children due to their busy work (Symons et al., 2017). These results can be interpreted as parents' communication with their children can affect their attitudes towards children's Internet use. In a study conducted by Zhou et al. (2024) with 1974 adolescents between the ages of 14-22, it was stated that mothers are the first person with whom the child interacts and connects socially and that the Internet is a better substitute for fathers than mothers. Hence, fathers' attitudes are one of the most effective factors in children's Internet use. In another study dealing with this issue, it is reported that an authoritarian and restrictive attitude of mothers and fathers towards their children's Internet use causes children to talk less with their parents about Internet use and that fathers show a more understanding attitude towards their children's Internet use compared to mothers. Instead of these inconsistent attitudes of mothers and fathers, it is stated that a reconciliatory attitude in which both mothers and fathers act jointly with their children will have a positive effect on children's sharing with their parents about Internet

use, children's Internet use skills and digital skills (Savic, 2022). In a study conducted by Yücelyiğit and Aral (2020) with 61 adolescents between the ages of 7-15, it was concluded that parents' indifferent or oppressive attitude toward their child's Internet use negatively affected the frequency of the child's Internet use. Authoritarian attitudes of parents not only negatively affect children's Internet use but also increase the likelihood of children trying various substances harmful to health and even becoming addicted to them (Oğuz & Özçelik, 2018). In summary, both mothers' and fathers' communication with their children and their attitudes towards their children's Internet use greatly affect children's social media usage habits, their ability to manage their addiction to the Internet, and their problematic Internet use (Yıldırım Demirdöğen et al., 2024).

Mothers expressed the negative effects of the Internet on children in daily life as "*Behavioral problems, self-regulation, communication problems, health problems, emulation of negative examples, addiction*", and fathers expressed the negative effects of the Internet on children in daily life as "*Communication, self-regulation, behavior problems, addiction*", respectively. They expressed it as "Communication, self-regulation, behavior problems". In Symons et al. (2017) study, both mothers and fathers expressed the negative effects of the Internet on children in daily life as the child responding to friendship offers from people they do not know, being exposed to bullying through the Internet, and examining sexually explicit sites. In a similar study on the subject, in addition to these results, it is stated that the position of children who are victims of cyberbullying can evolve from victim to bully over time (Öğretir Özçelik, 2021). This study found that during the time spent by parents outside the Internet, mothers usually do housework and spare time for themselves, while most of the fathers watch television and very few spend time with their families. However, in the findings obtained from the parents, there is no data that parents do healthy activities. When the data obtained from children and parents are compared, parents are thought to criticize their children for engaging in online activities. However, parents are actually far from healthy activities and do not take the necessary steps to spend time with their children. When the data obtained from this study are evaluated in a holistic manner, it is seen that problematic Internet use is not a concept specific only to children, that families also have expressions and behaviors within the scope of problematic Internet use in terms of Internet usage time, purpose of Internet use, the importance they attach to the Internet, the activities they do outside the Internet, that the negative effects of the Internet they state for their children are actually valid for themselves, that although they state that they see the Internet as a completely negative factor, in fact, the maximum time that most of them can spend without the Internet is not long, It can be said that children have more awareness than their parents about the uncontrolled use of the Internet, but their parents do not sufficiently recognize this awareness of children, children can also use the Internet for useful purposes, but parents do not believe their children in this regard and do not give their children enough information about Internet use and expect their children to be conscious.

#### **4.1 Limitations and future research**

The study is limited to 10 children aged 10-15 years and their parents who applied to a private psychological counseling center between September 2022 and September 2023 due to problematic Internet use and volunteered to participate in the study. Since there are many reasons underlying children's problematic use of the Internet, it is recommended to expand the study group and increase the studies in the studies conducted on this subject, to conduct comparative studies by interviewing both parents instead of a single parent in studies involving parents, to

examine the effect of the environment on the child's problematic Internet use by interviewing the children's friends as well as their parents, and to conduct interventional studies to minimize problematic Internet use.

## 4.2 Conclusion and recommendations

As a result, it was concluded that children could also use the Internet for educational and child-beneficial purposes, but parents stated that their children's Internet usage purposes consisted of playing games and watching videos, that one of the most important reasons for children's frequent use of the Internet is the communication gap between the child and the family. It was found that children clearly stated the duration of their Internet use. They are aware that they use the Internet problematically and are uncomfortable with this situation, and the parents' statements about the duration of their children's Internet use overlap with their children's statements. The majority of children cannot imagine or even imagine a situation without the Internet. From this point of view, the main basis of children's problematic Internet use is that although the Internet is at the center of children's lives, most children cannot clearly express the time they can spend without it. In other words, children do not know which situation they will be in and for how long they will use the Internet. Individuals between the ages of 10-15 are actually introduced to the Internet before puberty, even in the pre-school period, by their parents. This is because parents present the Internet as a means of distraction to children from a very young age and do not draw the necessary boundaries for children in this regard. Children are exposed to the Internet by their parents from an early age. However, when children reach adolescence and start to use the Internet problematically, parents display an accusatory and critical attitude toward the child. Parents do not establish healthy communication with their children, do not talk to them enough, and think the child should initiate the communication. In other words, they do not talk to their children about the Internet in general. It was seen that few parents have healthy communication with their children, and there are even parents who stated that they deliberately reduced their interest and love for their children. Parents state that they follow their children's Internet use preferences and intervene in these preferences when necessary, but half of the children do not have enough information about their parents' Internet use. The parents' statements about healthy Internet use generally consist of criticizing statements that condemn the child's frequent use of the Internet rather than how to use the Internet. While fathers stated that they mostly talked about Internet use with their children, mothers said they talked more with their children about Internet use and what they do on the Internet than fathers. Therefore, there is an inconsistency in the statements of fathers here. Children are aware of the negative effects of the Internet and know how to make positive use of the Internet. Children stated the positive effects of the Internet on daily life as benefiting from the Internet for their lessons and relieving their feelings of boredom. Children prefer the Internet very often for socializing and spend too much time on the Internet due to poor communication between parents and children. In the thoughts of mothers and fathers about the positive effects of the Internet on the child's life, it is seen that they state that the Internet does not have a positive effect on the child's life, so parents ignore that the Internet can be useful in some cases. It is seen that mothers think that the Internet has a negative effect on children's self-regulation, communication skills, nutrition, and sleep patterns, and fathers think that the Internet negatively affects children's self-regulation, communication skills, attention, and memory skills. Both mothers and fathers think that the Internet causes behavioral and health problems. From this point of view, it can be said that both mothers and fathers realize and accept that children's problematic Internet use harms children. Children stated that the activities they do without the

Internet are healthy activities (drawing, reading books, doing sports, spending time with friends, etc.), but parents have no idea about these activities. Nearly all of the children have more than one technological device with Internet access. Mothers have more information about the tools their children use to access the Internet than fathers. When the answers given are analyzed, ambiguous expressions are generally more common in parents' answers than children's. This is thought to be since parents (especially fathers) do not spend much time with their children based on healthy communication. Instead of adopting a solution-oriented or democratic attitude towards the problems underlying their children's problematic Internet use, parents mostly adopt an authoritarian, restrictive, and criticizing attitude.

Based on these results, it is recommended to expand the study group in future studies, work with different age groups and teachers, and examine the effect of the environment on the child's problematic Internet use by interviewing the children's friends and their parents. In order to recognize, understand, and make healthy use of the rapidly changing and developing digital world, informative and educational interventions should be developed for individuals around the child, especially families, in areas such as digital literacy and media literacy.

## 5 Status of authors

### 5.1 Contribution rate status of authors

Each author contributed equally to this study.

### 5.2 Conflict situation

The authors have confirmed that there are no potential conflicts.

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