

# Internet Addiction as Predictor in Marital Relationship among a Sample of Divorced Women

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## Abstract

This study investigates the predictive relationship between Internet addiction and marital incompatibility among a sample of divorced women. Given the rapid technological advancements and the pervasive influence of the Internet on marital compatibility, this research examines the extent to which Internet addiction serves as a predictor for marital enhancers and inhibitors of compatibility. Utilizing a sample of 123 divorced women, the study employs the Internet Addiction Scale (IAS) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ) and the Marital Compatibility Inhibitors and Enhancers Scale (MCIES) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .76, .72$ , respectively). The findings reveal a high prevalence of Internet addiction ( $M=4.23, SD=.57$ ), elevated levels of inhibitors ( $M=4.18, SD=.64$ ) affecting marital adjustment, and a diminished presence of enhancers ( $M=1.75, SD=.60$ ) promoting marital compatibility. Statistical analysis demonstrates significant and robust correlations between Internet addiction and both marital adjustment inhibitors ( $r = .789$ ) and enhancers ( $r = -.991$ ) among divorced women. Furthermore, Internet addiction accounts for 61.9% of the variance in inhibitors and negatively correlates with 98.2% of the variance in enhancers. The study concluded that the Internet addiction affects the marital relationship, and thus negatively affecting the cohesion of the family and society.

## INTRODUCTION

The Internet has become an integral part of daily life for many individuals, functioning as a crucial social network. While the Internet stands as one of the most significant modern technological advancements, offering myriad services across various life domains when used judiciously, it is a double-edged weapon. In instances of misuse and excessive reliance, individuals may succumb to ceaseless distractions, forfeit their independence, and become ensnared by the Internet, thereby allowing it to control all aspects of their lives a phenomenon referred to as Internet addiction.

The extent to which individuals allocate time to the Internet varies, with some reaching the point of addiction, posing significant risks. Internet users may engage in both positive and negative relationships, characterized primarily by an individual's inability to exert control due to the absence of restraint. Consequently, individuals may engage in actions they would refrain from in reality, including intrusions into others' privacy (Saracoglu et al., 1989).

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) has highlighted the adverse consequences of Internet misuse, including mood swings that render individuals' unconscious and detached from spatial, temporal, and human reality. This escapism into virtual reality may lead to a weakening of social and functional skills as individuals seek to fulfill desires unattainable in

normal life, including the marital relationship (Chattopadhyay et al., 2020). Women complain about their husbands' excessive use of the Internet, which results in their neglect, mistreatment and betrayal, which may result in divorce (Aydin et al., 2018).

Few studies have been conducted on the relationship between internet addiction and marital relations, for example, Chattopadhyay et al. (2020) found that the risk of internet addiction negatively affected marital satisfaction. Bla (2021) found a statistically significant positive correlation between the husband's internet addiction and the wife's marital alienation in its dimensions (marital isolation, dissatisfaction with family life, weak family values). Therefore, this study seeks to measure the level of internet addiction, levels of marital adjustment, and the predictive power of internet addiction in relation to marital adjustment, taking into account its inhibitory and enhancing dimensions, within the demographic composition of divorced women.

## **Theoretical Background**

### ***Marital Relationship***

The nuclear family constitutes the fundamental societal unit and contributes to the attainment of psychological equilibrium. Consequently, marital life assumes religious, psychological, social, and moral significance. Within the realm of psychology, there exists a preoccupation with the notion of marital compatibility, given its pivotal role in fostering psychological and social stability within the familial context. Marital compatibility, as delineated by Manani & Nougi (2013), encompasses the attainment of marital happiness and satisfaction facilitated by judicious life partner selection, preparedness for matrimony, mutual love and responsibility, adept problem-solving capabilities, and the manifestation of stability and happiness through the convergence of similarities in personal traits, cultural backgrounds, and shared values between spouses. Oraki & Fard Aghayi (2019) found that there is a positive correlation between personality traits (openness and conscientiousness) with compatibility, openness and marital satisfaction.

Conversely, scholars in the fields of psychology and sociology have elucidated the concept of marital incompatibility, attributing it to various factors. Notably, Amato (2014) defines marital incompatibility as spousal behaviors that cause harm and deprivation, preventing the satisfaction of needs and obstructing the achievement of marriage-related goals, thereby negatively impacting the marital relationship. Neff & Karney (2017) argue that the lack of consensus between spouses on key aspects of their shared life, the failure to collaboratively engage in common pursuits, and a deficit in emotional exchange collectively contribute to marital incompatibility. Oraki & Fard Aghayi (2019) also found that there is a negative correlation between the personality trait psychosis and the level of psychological stress and marital satisfaction.

Marital incompatibility is influenced by several factors. Williamson et al. (2020) found that lower-income couples experience higher rates of relationship disruption, including divorce and the dissolution of previously existing relationships. Ehoru & Badey (2021) found that social media use led to domestic violence, decreased levels of communication, conflicts and separation leading to infidelity and subsequently divorce. Asfaw & Alene (2023) found that the reasons for marital dissolution are social and economic reasons, communication and commitment issues, external pressures, changes in attitudes and behavior, and disagreements over sexual matters and personal interests.

Based on above this study posits that one of the reasons of marital incompatibility is the misuse of internet and internet addiction, this assumption is based on some studies, for instance Tohidast et al. (2020) showed that the subcomponents of Internet addiction (lack of control; social withdrawal and emotional conflict; time management problems; and concealment of problematic behavior) influenced emotional exhaustion among couples which leads to marital

dissatisfaction, and Bla (2021) Bla also found a positive relationship between the internet addiction and the marital alienation.

### **Internet Addiction**

The ubiquity of Internet utilization initiated in 1990, witnessing a 9% engagement among adults in the United States by 1995. Progressively, the global prevalence of Internet users surpassed 25.6% in 2009, indicating a noteworthy and expeditious surge. The multifaceted applications of the Internet, encompassing functions such as information dissemination, communication, academic instruction, and scientific investigation, have become indispensable for diverse societal cohorts, including university students (Lam et al., 2009).

The term "Internet addiction" encompasses a spectrum of disorders arising from excessive Internet consumption, indicating a physiological reliance on a specific stimulus or psychological substance (Davis & Brazeau, 2021). Diagnostic criteria, in accordance with the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatry, identify individuals manifesting heightened, compulsive, and enduring Internet engagement, marked by withdrawal symptoms and a loss of self-regulation, akin to addictive disorders associated with substance abuse (Goodman, 1993; Lacey, 1993).

Symptoms of Internet addiction, elucidated by Young (1999), encompass obsessive thoughts, diminished impulse control, and an inability to cease Internet usage, indicative of an unhealthy pattern of Internet utilization. (Young et al., 1999) has proposed a comprehensive set of diagnostic criteria for identifying Internet addiction which draws upon similar criteria used in diagnosing gambling addiction. These criteria include persistent thoughts about online activities even when not actively engaged online, the need to spend increasing amounts of time online to achieve the same level of pleasure or satisfaction, repeatedly trying to reduce or stop Internet use without success, experiencing negative emotions such as upset, depression, or irritability when attempting to decrease Internet use, using the Internet for longer periods than originally intended, suffering from significant deterioration in personal or professional relationships due to excessive Internet use, engaging in dishonesty by lying to family members or therapists about the extent of Internet use, using the Internet as a means to escape from real-life problems or to alleviate feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, or depression.

Internet addiction manifests as a disproportionate and compulsive escalation in Internet usage, giving rise to anxious mood behaviors (Mitchell, 2000). Individuals affected by this phenomenon display behaviors such as prolonged online presence, withdrawal from social connections, and neglect of professional responsibilities, thereby distorting their perception of the surrounding world. In their study, Kuss & Griffiths (2011) defined Internet addiction as the inability to control one's use of the Internet, leading to negative consequences in areas such as interpersonal relationships, work, and academic performance. Charlton (2002) characterizes it as a pathological and non-consensual utilization of the Internet, culminating in clinical disorders marked by withdrawal symptoms.

The progression of Internet addiction is delineated through three stages: acquisition or infatuation, liberation, and equilibrium (Diclemente, 2018). Research by Davis (2001) highlights various forms of Internet addiction, encompassing difficulties in regulating impulses and dependencies on activities such as online gaming, social media, virtual relationships, cybersex, and compulsive web browsing. Recent research by Weinstein & Lejoyeux (2015) highlights the detrimental effects of Internet addiction on various aspects of health, psychology, and social well-being. They emphasize the physical health consequences such as musculoskeletal issues, sleep disturbances, and obesity, alongside psychological issues like depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Additionally, they discuss the social ramifications, including strained relationships, social isolation, and decreased academic or work performance, associated with excessive Internet use.

On the psychological front, Internet addiction is associated with the creation of an unrealistic and illusionary world, impeding the development of a normative psychological personality capable of engaging with society and reality. Social consequences materialize in the form of withdrawal from social interactions, impacting cultural identity, habits, values, and family relationships, ultimately contributing to disintegration and divorce (Ko et al., 2014).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Several efforts have been conducted to clarify the negative effect of Internet addiction on marital relationships (Asfaw & Alene, 2023; Hawi & Samaha, 2016; Tohidast et al., 2020; Turel & Serenko, 2017; Young, 1998). Previous studies have established a positive correlation between Internet addiction and various negative behaviors such as mental disorders, withdrawal from social interactions, marital infidelity, or divorce. Within the study population, there has been a noticeable increase in divorce cases, which adversely impacts the relationship between spouses and, consequently, their children.

It is hypothesized that Internet addiction, characterized by prolonged hours spent on social networking sites by one or both spouses, contributes to marital discord and incompatibility, ultimately leading to divorce. This hypothesis forms the basis for the current study, which aims to examine the relationship between Internet addiction and marital compatibility. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the level of Internet addiction among divorced women in the study population, the level of inhibitors of marital compatibility among divorced women in the study population, the level of enhancers of marital compatibility among divorced women in the study population, and the predictive power of Internet addiction in marital adjustment inhibitors and marital adjustment enhancers among divorced women in the study population.

## **METHODS**

### **Study Design**

This study employed a descriptive correlational approach, deemed most suitable for achieving the research objectives, as it analyzes the relationships between variables.

### **Participants**

A sample of 123 divorced women was selected using a convenience sampling method, with data obtained from the Family Protection Center of the Ministry of Interior and various Family Protection Centers associated with semi-civil institutions. Participants represented diverse regions and cultures within the study community. They expressed a willingness to engage in the application of the study tools, citing neglect of their familial responsibilities, attributed to Internet addiction, as a contributing factor to their divorce.

### **Measures**

The Internet Addiction Scale, comprising 20 items, was developed through a comprehensive review of theoretical literature and prior studies conducted by Al-Osaimi (2010), Al-Khawaja (2014), and El-Shafei (2010). The items were formulated based on the diagnostic criteria established by Young & Rogers (1998) for Internet addiction. Notably, the wording of the items was tailored specifically to ensure they were relevant and applicable for divorced women, facilitating accurate responses from this demographic. To ensure the content validity, the scale was evaluated by 11 expert arbitrators specializing in psychology, psychological counseling, and the Arabic language, who provided feedback on the linguistic clarity of the items. Following this review, the final version of the scale retained all 20 items.

To assess discriminant validity, the scale was administered to a separate survey sample of 20 divorced individuals, distinct from the main study sample. This allowed for the calculation

of corrected correlation coefficients for item relationships, which served as indicators of internal consistency validity; the coefficients ranged from .37 to .58. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to evaluate the internal consistency reliability of the scale, yielding a value of  $\alpha = .86$ .

For the assessment of Internet addiction, a five-point Likert scale was employed, with responses ranging from "always" (5) to "never" (1). The interpretation of scores was categorized as follows: low (1-2.33), medium (2.34-3.67), and high (3.68-5).

Marital Adjustment Inhibitors and Enhancers is a scale of two dimensions of marital compatibility inhibitors (10 items) and enhancers (10 items). It is directed for divorced women. The scale was developed by revising theoretical literature and the previous studies of Khalil (1998), Al-Qahtani (2017), and Abdel Meguid (2002).

To verify the logical validity of the scale it was presented to 11 arbitrators with expertise and competence in the fields of psychology, psychological guidance, and Arabic language to revise its fitness to the study, their notes focused on the linguistic reformulation of all items of the scale. Thus, after the arbitration, the number of items remained in its final form for each subscale.

Furthermore, the internal consistency and reliability of the Internet addiction scale were conducted by applying it to a survey sample consisting of (20) divorced women from outside the study sample. The corrected correlation coefficients ranged from .37-.55 for inhibitors and .34 - .55 for enhancers. The Internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha were  $\alpha = .76$  and  $\alpha = .72$  for inhibitors and enhancers, respectively.

A 5-point Likert scale of 20 items was conducted for both dimensions, thus, the raw scores for each subscale ranged between from (10-40). The level of marital adjustment inhibitors or enhancers of marital adjustment was high if the mean was greater than (3.66), moderate if it was within (2.34-3.66), and low if it was less than (2.34).

## Procedures

The research problem was initially identified, followed by the preparation of appropriate scales and the extraction of their psychometric properties. The scales were designed in both paper format and on Google Forms. After securing official approvals from the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Social Development to conduct the study, data on divorced women registered with the relevant institutions were collected. This data indicated that neglect of household duties due to Internet and social media addiction was a contributing factor to their divorces.

Subsequently, the addresses of these women were obtained, and they were approached to gauge their willingness to participate in the study. Participation options included receiving the paper scales through personal interviews or accessing the scales via a link to the Google Forms version. Each participant received a cover letter outlining the study's purpose, instructions for completing the scale, and assurances that their responses would be used solely for scientific research. The completion of the scales took approximately 30 minutes. Following this, the data were transcribed or imported into the SPSS software for subsequent analysis.

## Data Collection

Statistical treatments of the study data were carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V28), as follows. To answer the first, second and third study questions; means and standard deviations were calculated. To answer the third study question; Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated for the relationship of Internet addiction and the subscales of the marital relationships. Regression analysis was used to determine the predictive power of the internet addiction in marital relationship. The classification of correlation coefficients is as follows: between (.00-.09); very small (false), between (.10-.29); small,

between (.30-.49); medium, between (.50-.69); large, between (.70-.89); very large, between (.90-1.00); almost complete (Hopkins, 2002).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

To answer the descriptive questions about the levels of Internet addiction, the inhibitors, and the enhancers of marital relationship among divorced women the means, standard deviations, and the correlations between the variables were calculated as shown in Table 1. Table 1 displays the means (M) and standard deviations (SD) of Internet addiction, inhibitors, and enhancers of marital relationship among divorced women. Additionally, it presents the levels of these variables and their Pearson's correlations.

The mean score for Internet addiction was 4.23 (SD = 0.57), indicating a high level. The mean score for inhibitors was 4.18 (SD = 0.64), also reflecting a high level. In contrast, the mean score for enhancers was 1.75 (SD = 0.60), indicating a low level.

Correlation analysis revealed significant relationships among the variables. Specifically, Internet addiction showed a strong positive correlation with inhibitors of marital relationship ( $r = 0.789$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, Internet addiction demonstrated a strong negative correlation with enhancers of marital relationship ( $r = -0.991$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Additionally, there was a strong negative correlation between inhibitors and enhancers of marital relationship ( $r = -0.775$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

To determine the relative contribution of Internet addiction to the inhibitors and enhancers of marital relationship, regression analysis by Enter method was used, as shown in Table 2. Table 2 presents the results of regression analyses aimed at discerning the impact of Internet addiction on both inhibitors and enhancers of marital relationship. The independent variable examined is Internet addiction, while the dependent variables consist of inhibitors and enhancers of marital adjustment.

For inhibitors of marital adjustment, the regression model accounted for a substantial proportion of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.619$ ,  $F(1, N = 123) = 198.901$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Internet addiction significantly predicted inhibitors of marital adjustment ( $\beta = 0.899$ ,  $t = 14.103$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Similarly, for enhancers of marital adjustment, the regression model demonstrated a high explanatory power ( $R^2 = 0.982$ ),  $F(1, N = 123) = 6561.893$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Internet addiction exhibited a significant negative association with enhancers of marital adjustment ( $\beta = -1.057$ ,  $t = -81.006$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Table 1. Means and, Standard Deviations, Level, and Pearson's correlation

| Variables          | M    | SD  | Level | Correlations |        |
|--------------------|------|-----|-------|--------------|--------|
|                    |      |     |       | 1            | 2      |
| Internet addiction | 4.23 | .57 | high  |              |        |
| Inhibitors         | 4.18 | .64 | high  | .789*        |        |
| Enhancers          | 1.75 | .60 | low   | -.991*       | -.775* |

Table 2. Regression Analyses to Determine the Relative Contribution

| Independent        | Dependents                       | R <sup>2</sup> | F        | Sig.              | B      | $\beta$ | t       | Sig. |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|----------------|----------|-------------------|--------|---------|---------|------|
| Internet Addiction | Inhibitors of Marital Adjustment | .619           | 198.901  | .000              | .899   | .789    | 14.103  | .000 |
|                    | Enhancers of Marital Adjustment  | .982           | 6561.893 | .000 <sup>b</sup> | -1.057 | -.991   | -81.006 | .000 |

## Discussion

The results revealed high level of marital compatibility inhibitors and low level of marital compatibility enhancers. This result may be explained by the study sample socio-economic status SES, this community suffers from difficult economic conditions, which may affect marital compatibility and marital satisfaction. This was proven by [Dobrowolska et al. \(2020\)](#) that there is a negative inverse relationship between economic status and marital satisfaction. Moreover, social changes in family lifestyle in the Eastern world have put pressure on couples that have affected marital compatibility, which may have led to divorce, and that what [Nadolu et al. \(2020\)](#) found that social changes related to more liberal sexual attitudes and people's optimistic view of the importance of money are negatively associated with poor-quality marital satisfaction.

The study's findings indicate a high prevalence of Internet addiction. Prolonged Internet use by couples, averaging 4-5 hours daily, results in considerable time wastage and serves as a marker for Internet addiction, subsequently contributing to social isolation ([Ibriem, 2015](#)). These claims are supported by the psychodynamic perspective, which posits that Internet addiction is an escape response from frustrations, seeking alternative pleasures for satisfaction and forgetting. Excessive use of denial mechanisms is a predictor and indicator of Internet addiction. The availability of the computer and anonymous transactions under fictitious names are factors that highlight Internet addiction and provide a virtual environment for self-evasion from emotional difficulties or problematic situations. This behavior is reinforced over time, leading to increased stress and psychological pressure ([Sela et al., 2020](#)).

The ease of using computers, accessing the Internet, and the various programs it contains, including scientific and entertainment information, calls, and conversations (chat), results in intense dependence on this network. This dependence compensates for family interaction, decreases the level of direct social relationships, increases social isolation, and impairs the ability to establish real social relationships. The Internet becomes dominant, causing individuals to largely avoid others to engage in preferred activities, leading to increased isolation, introversion, and nervousness during Internet outages or device malfunctions. This proposal is consistent with [Weinstein & Lejoyeux \(2015\)](#), which found that excessive Internet use leads to social isolation.

Theoretical literature indicates that Internet addiction reduces psychosocial health, even when used as a communication tool. According to the behavioral trend, the rewards provided by the Internet cognitive, emotional, social, recreational, and commercial constitute addictive behavior. This behavior becomes typical, reinforcing and repeating itself, intensifying over time, and leading to behavioral, psychological, and emotional disorders. These gratifications make the Internet one of the most important and valuable activities in an individual's life, controlling their thinking and feelings, and causing excessive preoccupation, cognitive distortions, social behavior disorders, and a strong desire to continue this activity. When this activity is reduced or discontinued, individuals experience discomfort and unhappiness ([Alavi et al., 2011](#)).

One common reason for Internet addiction is the feeling of loneliness and isolation, leading individuals to spend most of their time in Internet activities, perceiving the computer as more understanding than others. The Internet becomes an alternative self and a best friend ([Sum et al., 2008](#)).

The results also indicated that Internet addiction predicts both inhibitors (positively) and enhancers (negatively) of marital relationships. Higher rates of Internet addiction correspond to greater inhibitors to marital compatibility and lower enhancers of marital relationships. This study's results align with previous studies indicating a positive correlation between high levels of Internet addiction, poor compatibility between spouses, and high divorce rates ([Al-Harbi, 2017](#); [Bla, 2021](#); [El-Shimy, 2018](#)). Electronic infidelity weakens emotional relationships

between spouses (Al-Ibrahim, 2018; Al-Rashed, 2020). This finding may be attributed to couples' preference for the Internet over social activities and interactions, prompting withdrawal from marital life. The Internet reduces the time spent establishing real social relationships, providing ecstasy through unexplored worlds and horizons, thus eliminating the need for real friendships and social relationships. It offers free membership without conditions, restrictions, or responsibilities in the virtual world, compensating for real integration with others (Chattopadhyay et al., 2020; Shamala & Kanthy, 2021).

The ubiquitous availability of mobile phones facilitates constant Internet access for couples. This pervasive usage within the home environment is associated with numerous familial issues, including marital conflicts and disputes, ultimately leading to marital estrangement (Goulet, 2002). Internet addiction leads to a lack of dialogue within the family and a gap between couples. It contributes to marital infidelity, which can lead to divorce and distrust between spouses. Individuals may use the Internet to avoid family problems, resulting in a loss of satisfaction with marital roles and pessimism about the continuation of the marital relationship (Chemnad et al., 2022). Taş (2020) found that divorced women suffer from anxiety and Internet addiction, which negatively affects their marital life, which may be one of the reasons for divorce.

Misuse of the Internet leads to social preoccupation, negative emotions, lack of impulse control, and impulsive behaviors (Chen et al., 2007; Shapira et al., 2000). These findings suggest that excessive Internet misuse decreases life satisfaction and Internet and social networking sites, neglecting family responsibilities and their families, leading to marital instability and social isolation.

This finding is consistent with studies by Zawada & Skurzyńska (2021) which found a negative correlation between spouses' Facebook addiction and marital satisfaction. Chen et al. (2007) demonstrated a relationship between Internet addiction and family pressures, revealing significant differences between Internet addicts and non-addicts in terms of family relationships, attitudes toward school, and coping with pressures. With age, the routine of life between spouses increases, along with responsibilities, life pressures, and future anxiety for the wife, leading to boredom with marital and family life, increased marital silence, and marital alienation. This finding is consistent with studies by Glenn et al. (2010), which showed that marital alienation increases with age. Tong et al. (2021) pointed out that conversations with individuals than the partners may cause many marital problems, particularly when preferred Internet usage times are in the evening, affecting the wife's family role.

### **Limitations and future suggestions**

Despite the important results reached by the study, there are some limitations that limit the generalization of the results. The sample size may have a role in the results of the study being this way, but according to Hyun et al. (2012) the sample in correlational studies can be at least 30 individuals. There is another limitation, which is the use of self-report measures, as this type of measures requires objectivity on the part of the study individuals, and this is what the study assumed.

Despite the previous limitations, there are some implications that can be benefited from, such as holding workshops and designing indicative preventive programs to develop families' awareness of the dangers of excessive use of the Internet, guiding couples to adopt positive rational ideas in dealing with the partner's addiction to the Internet. The families also benefit from the results of this study by increasing awareness of the dangers of the Internet and how to use it positively in strengthening family ties.



## CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study may provoke future research aimed at addressing the phenomenon of divorce and mitigating its impact on the family and society by designing counseling programs for families. Furthermore, conducting more studies to confirm or deny the findings of the current study. This study shed light on the seriousness of Internet addiction in affecting the marital relationship, and thus negatively affecting the cohesion of the family and society.

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