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ACT-SM

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The Effect of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy-Based Psychoeducation on Self-Esteem and Interpersonal Problem-Solving Skills in Youth with Social Media Addiction

Brief Title:

ACT-Based Psychoeducation for Youth with Social Media Addiction

Acronym:

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Institution:

Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University

Principal Investigator:

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Interventional (Clinical Trial)

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Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee

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**THE EFFECT OF ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY-BASED
PSYCHOEDUCATION ON SELF-ESTEEM AND INTERPERSONAL PROBLEM-
SOLVING SKILLS IN YOUTH WITH SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION**

Brief Summary

While social media offers opportunities for connection and self-expression, it also brings significant challenges, particularly social media addiction, characterized by excessive and uncontrolled use. Although not officially recognized as a diagnostic category, its inclusion among behavioral addictions reflects its growing impact on mental health. Social media addiction may lead to psychological symptoms such as family and social conflicts, stress due to unmet responsibilities, anxiety, and irritability. This problem has become especially critical among young people. A 2025 meta-analysis found the prevalence of social media addiction among university students to be 18.4% and reported negative effects on academic achievement. Research also shows that social media addiction is associated with decreased self-esteem, emotion regulation difficulties, and dysfunctional interpersonal relationships. Social comparison tendencies and idealized digital identity presentations further harm young individuals' self-perceptions, contributing to low self-esteem and social anxiety.

Interpersonal difficulties experienced in relationships are defined as "interpersonal problems," while the cognitive-behavioral processes used to resolve these difficulties are called "interpersonal problem solving". These skills are essential for effective conflict resolution, social adaptation, relationship quality, and overall well-being. Social media shapes both the emergence and resolution of interpersonal problems; however, current knowledge in this area is limited. Excessive use contributes to interpersonal conflicts, deterioration of relationships, and reduced face-to-face communication. Thus, social media addiction may impair interpersonal problem-solving skills by disrupting daily functioning.

Although the literature includes correlational studies on social media addiction, self-esteem, and interpersonal functioning, research testing Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)-based psychoeducation remains scarce. This study offers a theoretical contribution by applying a third-wave therapy approach to the psychosocial challenges of the digital age. It aims to evaluate the

effects of an ACT-based psychoeducation program developed for young individuals with social media addiction on self-esteem and interpersonal problem-solving skills. Given the limited number of such programs in Türkiye, this study is original and aims to fill an important gap in the literature.

Detailed Description

The widespread use of technology and early access to digital devices have significantly increased in recent years. Continuous connectivity, mobility, and affordability allow users to interact freely with social media. Young individuals often integrate mobile devices into daily routines, spend excessive time online, and keep devices nearby even during sleep. While social media allows relationship-building and self-expression, excessive and uncontrolled use may lead to social media addiction. Although not officially recognized in psychiatric diagnostic systems, its classification under behavioral addictions reflects its increasing impact on mental health. Behavioral addictions may cause family and social conflicts, stress due to unmet responsibilities, anxiety, and irritability.

Social media addiction is particularly prevalent among young adults. A 2025 meta-analysis reported a prevalence rate of 18.4% among university students and its negative effects on academic performance. Another study with 1,215 students found higher addiction levels associated with increased depression scores. Excessive use also affects body dissatisfaction and self-esteem. These findings show that social media addiction decreases self-esteem, disrupts emotional regulation, and impairs interpersonal functioning. Social comparison tendencies and idealized digital identities may worsen self-perceptions, contributing to low self-esteem and social anxiety.

Multiple studies have shown significant negative relationships between social media addiction and self-esteem. Facebook addiction has been linked to low self-esteem. Similarly, low self-esteem was associated with higher social media addiction scores. Research from Ecuador reported moderate negative effects of social media addiction on self-esteem and well-being. A 2023 adolescent study found that addiction negatively predicted self-esteem and body image. Self-esteem is a fundamental construct related to life satisfaction, self-efficacy, psychological resilience, and interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal difficulties are defined as "interpersonal problems," while cognitive and behavioral processes intended to reduce tension in these areas are conceptualized as "interpersonal problem-solving". Interpersonal problem-solving skills enable constructive conflict resolution and support

social adaptation, relationship quality, and well-being. Social media influences how individuals generate and solve interpersonal problems, though evidence is limited. Excessive use leads to relationship deterioration, communication restrictions, and increased interpersonal conflicts. Social media addiction may impair interpersonal problem-solving due to its negative impact on overall functioning. Additionally, individuals with higher interpersonal problem-solving skills show lower addiction levels. Internet addiction has also been associated with avoidance-oriented coping.

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), a mindfulness-based intervention focusing on psychological flexibility, encourages individuals to accept internal experiences and act in accordance with personal values. ACT promotes awareness of thoughts and emotions and engagement in value-driven behaviors. Research demonstrates its effectiveness for anxiety, depression, addictive behaviors, and self-perception. ACT-based interventions have reduced social media use and decreased psychological distress in university students. ACT has also been found effective in reducing FOMO and increasing psychological flexibility.

ACT has improved self-esteem and interpersonal problem-solving in diverse populations, such as individuals with schizophrenia, PCOS, body dysmorphic disorder, and obesity. ACT reduced internet addiction components and interpersonal difficulties among high school students. It also improved adolescents' interpersonal skills and was comparable to CBT in addressing interpersonal problems.

Despite the correlational evidence linking social media addiction to self-esteem and interpersonal functioning, ACT-based interventions remain limited, especially for young adults. Thus, our study offers theoretical and practical innovation by applying a third-wave therapy model to digital-age psychosocial problems. The study aims not only to reduce addictive behaviors but also to improve psychological flexibility, self-esteem, and interpersonal problem-solving skills. Findings are expected to guide mental health professionals, psychiatric nurses, counselors, and university guidance services.

The study also aligns with the 12th Development Plan (2024-2028), which emphasizes informing youth about digital risks, supporting evidence-based policy design, and promoting healthy technology use.

Hypotheses

H1a: ACT-based psychoeducation increases self-esteem.

H1b: ACT-based psychoeducation reduces ineffective interpersonal problem-solving.

H1c: ACT-based psychoeducation enhances effective interpersonal problem-solving.

H1d: ACT-based psychoeducation reduces social media addiction.

Study Design

This randomized controlled trial (RCT) will be conducted at Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University between November 1, 2025, and September 30, 2026. A 2×3 split-plot design (intervention/control \times pretest/posttest/follow-up) will be used. Assessments will occur at baseline, post-intervention, and two-month follow-up.

Study Population and Sample

The study population includes students aged 18-30 enrolled between 01-May-2025 and 01-June-2026. Based on G Power calculations (effect size $d = 0.30$; $\alpha = .05$; power = .90), 31 participants per group were required. With 20% added for attrition, the total sample is 74 (37 per group). Intervention groups will consist of approximately 7-8 participants.

Randomization Participants scoring ≥ 4 on the SMAS-AF will be randomized using simple randomization (Research Randomizer). A statistician not involved in the study will manage allocation.

Participants will be randomly assigned to either the intervention group, which will receive an 8-session ACT-based psychoeducational program, or the control group, which will not receive any intervention during the study period. Randomization will be performed using Research Randomizer by a statistician not involved in the study. The intervention and control groups will each consist of 37 participants. Both groups will complete assessments at baseline (pre-test), interim follow-up, and post-test using validated scales for self-esteem, interpersonal problem-solving skills, and social

media addiction. The control group will receive a single psychoeducation session after the follow-up assessment.

Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

Voluntary participation in the study.

Age between 18 and 30 years.

Social Media Addiction Scale - Adult Form (SMAS-AF) item average score of 4 or higher.

Exclusion Criteria:

Hearing or speech impairments that would prevent completing the surveys.

Currently participating in a similar psychoeducational program.

Receiving treatment for any psychiatric disorder at the time of the study.

Withdrawal Criteria:

Missing two consecutive sessions

Disruptive behavior

Non-compliance with group rules

Failure to complete session assignments

Variables

Independent variable: ACT-based psychoeducation program

Dependent variables: The score of Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), the score of Social Media Addiction Scale-Adult Form (SMAS-AF), the score of Interpersonal Problem-Solving Inventory

Data Collection Tools

Information Form; Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES); Social Media Addiction Scale-Adult Form (SMAS-AF); Interpersonal Problem-Solving Inventory.

Implementation

Baseline assessments will be completed face-to-face. The intervention group will attend eight ACT-based psychoeducation sessions administered by psychiatric nurse Zeynep Kekeç, certified in psychoeducation and ACT. Post-test assessments will be completed in the final session. The control group will not receive intervention during the study but will be offered a one-session program afterward.

Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed in SPSS. Normality will be assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Descriptive statistics will be calculated. Parametric or non-parametric analyses will be selected based on distribution. Cronbach's alpha values will be computed. Significance level: $p < .05$.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University Medical Research Ethics Committee. Permissions for scales were secured. Participation is voluntary, and confidentiality and withdrawal rights will be ensured.

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Links

Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı. 2023. "On İkinci Kalkınma Planı (2024-2028)

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