

IMPACT OF BASIC PSYCHOLOGICAL NEED AND SATISFACTION ON MARITAL ADJUSTMENT, MEDIATING ROLE OF PROBLEMATIC INTERNET USAGE

Original Article

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ABSTRACT

Background: Marital adjustment is deeply influenced by the fulfillment of individuals' basic psychological needs, which include autonomy, competence, and relatedness. However, the increasing prevalence of problematic internet use has introduced new variables that may interfere with relationship quality. Understanding how these factors interact within modern marriages is crucial for informing both psychological theory and practical interventions.

Objective: The primary aim of this study was to examine the relationship between basic psychological needs satisfaction and marital adjustment, while assessing the mediating role of problematic internet usage among married individuals.

Methods: A correlational research design was employed, involving 200 married participants (79 males, 121 females) aged between 25 and 35 years. Participants were selected using a combination of random, purposive, and snowball sampling techniques. Data were collected using the Basic Psychological Needs and Satisfaction Scale (BPNSS; $\alpha = .825$), the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS; $\alpha = .780$), and the Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale (PRIUSS; $\alpha = .825$). All scales demonstrated strong internal consistency, and the dataset met normality assumptions based on skewness and kurtosis values.

Results: Basic psychological needs were found to be a significant positive predictor of marital adjustment ($\beta = .406$, $p < 0.05$), explaining 16.5% of the variance. Problematic internet usage was significantly negatively associated with marital adjustment ($\beta = -.255$, $p < 0.05$), contributing to an increased model variance explanation of 22.9%. However, the relationship between basic psychological needs and problematic internet use was positive but statistically non-significant ($r = .072$, $p > 0.05$), and no mediating effect was observed.

Conclusion: The study highlights the essential role of psychological need fulfillment in enhancing marital quality while cautioning against the adverse effects of excessive internet use. These findings carry important implications for marital counseling, digital behavior regulation, and psychological interventions.

Keywords: Autonomy, Internet Addiction, Marital Satisfaction, Psychological Needs, Relationship Quality, Self-Determination Theory, Spouses.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage, one of the most significant social constructs, has existed since the dawn of human civilization, providing a framework for companionship, mutual support, and emotional fulfillment between partners (1). Its foundational principle lies in the mutual satisfaction of biological, social, and psychological needs that enhance relational stability and individual well-being (2). Over time, marriage has evolved not only as a cultural institution but also as a vital means for individuals to achieve pleasure, peace of mind, and happiness through the fulfillment of core psychological needs such as intimacy, autonomy, relatedness, and appreciation (3,4). These needs, while not essential for mere survival, are indispensable for a valued and meaningful life, fostering a desire for harmonious, lasting partnerships (5). However, contemporary challenges, particularly those arising from technological advancements, have introduced complexities into marital dynamics. Problematic internet usage, defined by excessive and maladaptive engagement with online platforms, has been linked with disruptions in social, occupational, and relational domains (6). Within marital relationships, such usage patterns may result in emotional neglect and reduced interpersonal connection, thereby impairing relational quality and satisfaction (7). Research has shown that when spouses spend disproportionate time online—regardless of the nature of their internet use—it often hinders essential emotional exchanges and undermines relational bonding (8).

Recent empirical investigations have further emphasized the intricate relationship between psychological need satisfaction, marital adjustment, and internet use. A study demonstrated that, individuals' extrinsic and intrinsic goal orientations significantly impact their relationship satisfaction through the mediating role of basic psychological needs. Employing the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model, their research confirmed that intrinsic goal pursuit positively correlates with psychological need satisfaction, whereas extrinsic goal pursuit yields the opposite effect, ultimately diminishing relationship well-being irrespective of whether the goals are self-held or attributed to a partner (9). Complementary findings by a study revealed that, psychological need satisfaction also mediates the relationship between community esteem and overall well-being, underscoring the centrality of psychological needs across both intimate and communal domains (10). Marital satisfaction is closely intertwined with the fulfillment of these needs. A study illustrated that, humor styles and effective spousal communication are crucial in nurturing psychological need satisfaction and achieving marital harmony. In this context, subjective well-being acts as a complete mediator, reinforcing the importance of compatible interpersonal dynamics (11). Similarly, a study explored marital satisfaction across early and late marriages, highlighting how the ability to confront shared challenges influences marital adjustment across the lifespan (12).

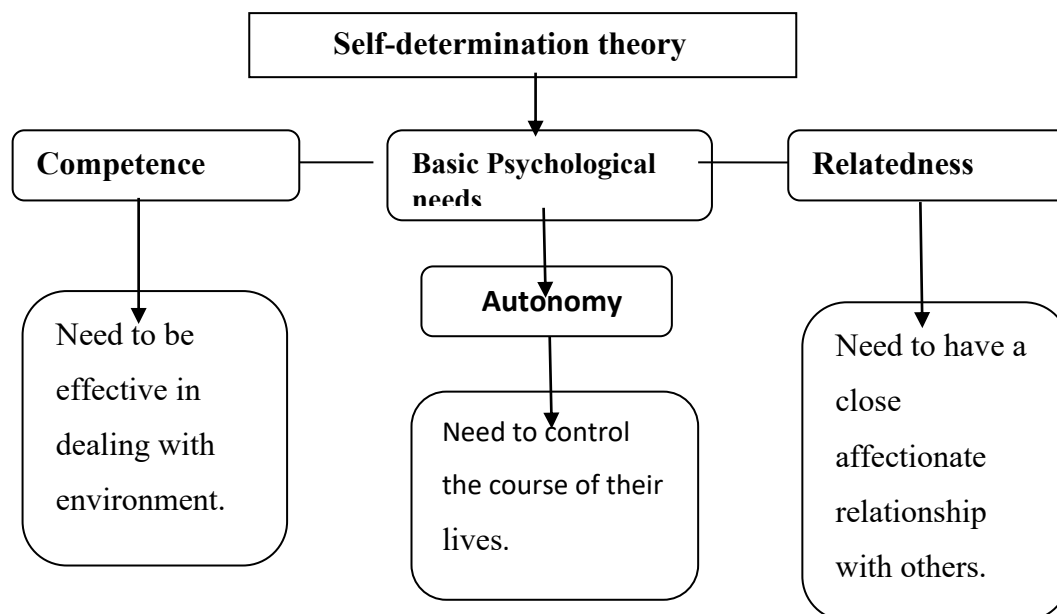
The increasing prevalence of problematic internet use, especially among married individuals, has drawn attention from mental health researchers. A study found a negative correlation between internet overuse and marital adjustment, suggesting that couples with strong problem-solving abilities, shared time satisfaction, and mutual trust exhibit higher marital quality and lower levels of maladaptive internet behavior (13). Supporting this, a study identified life satisfaction as a partial mediator in the link between psychological need fulfillment and problematic internet use, reinforcing the significance of addressing internal psychological drivers in reducing digital dependency (14). Gender-based differences in internet usage have also emerged, with studies indicating that male adolescents report higher levels of problematic internet use compared to females, who prefer more direct social interactions (15,16). Further investigation found that, autonomy and relatedness are strong predictors of intimacy goals and marriage idealization, suggesting that young adults' aspirations for marriage are deeply rooted in the satisfaction of psychological needs (17). In a related vein, a study assessed married women's psychological needs, self-efficacy, and marital happiness, identifying psychological well-being and happiness as key protective factors against emotional distress, such as depressive symptoms (18).

These converging strands of literature coalesce around the self-determination theory (SDT), which postulates that the fulfillment of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is essential for optimal functioning and well-being in all human contexts, including intimate relationships (19). SDT further posits that motivational orientations within relationships are not static but can be shaped by interpersonal experiences, leading to adaptive or maladaptive outcomes depending on the degree to which psychological needs are satisfied or thwarted. Given the growing societal reliance on digital technologies and their potential to disrupt fundamental relational processes, the present study aims to explore the interconnectedness between problematic internet use, marital adjustment, couple burnout, and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. The objective is to determine how psychological need fulfillment mediates the relationship between digital behavior and relational well-being in marital contexts, thereby contributing to the development of evidence-based interventions that support healthier relationships in an increasingly digitalized world.

METHODS

The present study employed a correlational research design to examine the relationship between basic psychological needs satisfaction and marital adjustment, with a specific focus on the mediating role of problematic internet use among young married individuals. This design was chosen to explore naturally occurring associations among psychological constructs without manipulating variables, thereby allowing for the identification of underlying patterns in relationship dynamics. Participants were selected based on well-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria required participants to be legally married individuals between the ages of 20 and 35, with a minimum of two years of marital experience, and possessing at least a basic educational background. These criteria aligned with the American Psychological Association's categorization of young adulthood and ensured a degree of relational maturity. Individuals who were divorced, widowed, physically disabled, or diagnosed with any form of mental disorder were excluded from participation to minimize potential confounding variables that could affect psychological well-being and marital dynamics.

A combination of purposive, random, and snowball sampling techniques was employed to recruit participants. Random sampling was applied where feasible, with participation not restricted to both partners of a couple. In purposive sampling, only those meeting specific inclusion criteria (i.e., age, marital duration, and education) were selected. Snowball sampling was utilized to increase reach, wherein initially enrolled participants were encouraged to refer other eligible married individuals within their social circles. Three standardized instruments were used to collect data. The Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction Scale comprised 21 items measuring autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are central components of Self-Determination Theory. Negatively worded items were reverse-scored prior to analysis, and subscale scores were computed to determine individual levels of need satisfaction. Marital adjustment was assessed using the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS), which includes 14 items categorized into three domains: consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion. Each item was rated on a five- or six-point Likert-type scale, reflecting subjective evaluations of relationship quality. To measure problematic internet use, the Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale (PRIUSS) was utilized. This instrument includes 18 items distributed across three subscales, specifically designed to assess excessive or maladaptive internet behaviors among adolescents and young adults. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Informed consent was obtained from all participants after providing them with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, confidentiality assurances, and the right to withdraw at any point without consequence. Data confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the study process in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.



RESULTS

The study comprised 200 married individuals, with a higher proportion of female participants ($n=121$, 60.5%) compared to males ($n=79$, 39.5%). The majority of participants belonged to nuclear families ($n=108$, 54.0%) while the remainder were from joint families ($n=92$, 46.0%). The average age of participants was 30.0 years ($SD = 3.62$), and the mean duration of marriage was 4.92 years ($SD = 2.82$). Psychometric analysis revealed strong internal consistency for all instruments used in the study. The Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction Scale (BPNSS) showed a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .825$, with a mean score of 77.72 ($SD = 15.24$), and a score range from 46 to 127. The Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) had a Cronbach's alpha of .780, with a mean score of 34.94 ($SD = 11.01$), and scores ranging from 16 to 64. The Problematic and Risky Internet Use Screening Scale (PRIUSS) demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .825$), with a mean score of 28.96 ($SD = 9.59$), and scores spanning from 1 to 59. The distribution of all variables fell within acceptable limits of skewness and kurtosis, confirming normality for parametric analyses.

Pearson correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant positive relationship between basic psychological needs satisfaction and marital adjustment ($r = .406$, $p < .01$). Problematic internet usage showed a significant negative relationship with marital adjustment ($r = -.224$, $p < .01$). However, the relationship between basic psychological needs satisfaction and problematic internet use was positive but not statistically significant ($r = .072$, $p > .05$). Stepwise linear regression analysis further supported these associations. In Step 1, basic psychological needs satisfaction was found to be a significant positive predictor of marital adjustment ($\beta = .406$, $R^2 = .165$, $p < .05$). In Step 2, after adding problematic internet usage into the model, both predictors remained significant. Basic psychological needs satisfaction remained positively associated with marital adjustment ($\beta = .424$, $p < .05$), whereas problematic internet usage emerged as a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.255$, $p < .05$). The overall model in Step 2 explained 22.9% of the variance in marital adjustment ($\Delta R^2 = .221$). Hypothesis testing results confirmed that there was a significant positive relationship between basic psychological needs and marital adjustment, supporting Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2 was also supported, indicating a significant negative association of problematic internet usage with both marital adjustment and basic psychological needs. Gender-based analysis showed significant differences in the variables, supporting Hypothesis 3. However, the mediation analysis revealed that problematic internet usage did not mediate the relationship between basic psychological needs and marital adjustment, thus failing to support Hypothesis 4.

Table 1: Socio-demographics characteristics of married couples (N=200)

Variables	F (%)	M(SD)
Gender		-
Male	79(39.5)	-
Female	121(60.5)	-
Family status		-
Joint	92(46.0)	-
Nuclear	108(54.0)	-
Age	-	30.0(3.62)
Duration	-	4.92(2.82)

Table 2: Psychometrics properties of study variables (N=200)

Scales	K	M	SD	A	Range	Kurtosis	Skewness
BPNSS	21	77.72	15.24	.825	46-127	1.28	.433
RDAS	14	34.94	11.01	.780	16-64	-.498	.595
PRIUSS	18	28.96	9.59	.825	1-59	1.341	-.170

Note: BPNSS= Basic psychological need and satisfaction scale, PRIUSS= Problematic and risky internet usage screening scale, RDAS= Revised dyadic adjustment scale.

Note; K= no of items, M=mean, SD=standard deviation, α = reliability coefficient, Range= minimum or maximum values

Table 3: Correlation between basic psychological needs and satisfaction, marital adjustment, problematic internet usage (N=200)

Variables	1	2	3
BPNS	-	.072	.406**
PRIUS		-	-.224**
MA			-

Note: BPNS= Basic psychological need and satisfaction PRIUS= Problematic and risky internet usage, MA= Adjustment scale.

Table 4: Step wise analysis of regression predicting marital adjustment (N=200)

		CI 95%					
Variables	B	LL	UL	SE	β	R ²	ΔR^2
Step1						.165	.160
BPNS	.293	.201	.386	.042	.406		
Step 2						.229	.221
BPNS	.306	.217	.396	.045	.424		
PRIU	-.292	.434	-.150	.072	-.255		

Note: BPNS= Basic psychological need and satisfaction, PRIUS= Problematic and risky internet usage, MA= Marital adjustment.

Table 5: Summary of hypothesized table

Sr.#	Hypothesis	Status
H ¹	There is likely to have a positive relationship between basic psychological needs and marital adjustment in married couples.	Supported
H ²	Problematic internet usage is likely to have a negative relation with basic psychological needs and marital adjustment.	supported
H ³	There is likely to have a gender difference in basic psychological needs, marital adjustment and problematic internet usage.	Supported
H ⁴	Problematic internet usage will likely to mediate the relationship between basic psychological needs and marital adjustment	Un Supported

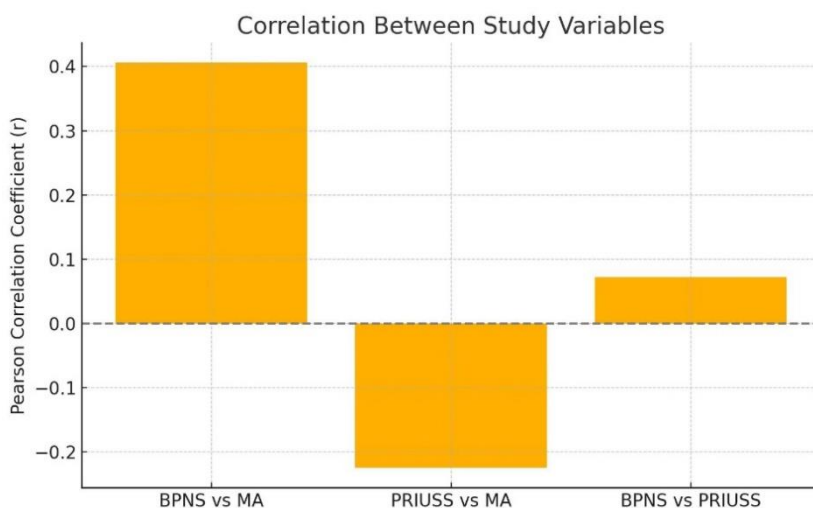


Figure 1 Correlation Between Study Variables

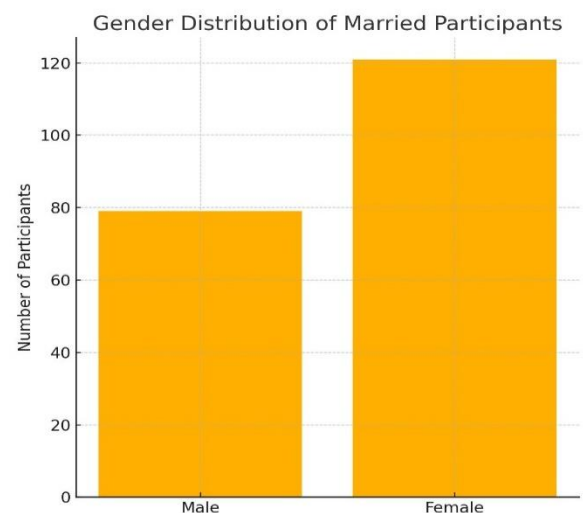


Figure 2 Gender Distribution of Married Participants

DISCUSSION

The present study explored the impact of basic psychological needs on marital adjustment and examined whether problematic internet usage mediates this relationship. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between basic psychological needs satisfaction and marital adjustment, aligning with previous research grounded in Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential components for individual and relational well-being (16). These outcomes affirm that when these psychological needs are met, individuals experience healthier and more satisfying marital relationships. The observed negative association between problematic internet usage and marital adjustment corroborates earlier studies highlighting the disruptive influence of excessive internet use on interpersonal relationships (17,18). As couples spend increased time online—whether for work, entertainment, or social media—the emotional and communicative engagement between partners tends to decline, leading to reduced cohesion and satisfaction. Although a negative relationship was expected between basic psychological needs and problematic internet usage, the findings demonstrated a non-significant yet positive association, suggesting that the presence of unmet needs does not uniformly translate into increased digital reliance. This may point to individual variability in coping mechanisms, where not all individuals resort to digital behavior as a response to psychological frustration (19,20).

Regression analysis confirmed that basic psychological needs satisfaction was a strong positive predictor of marital adjustment, while problematic internet usage contributed a statistically significant negative influence. However, the hypothesized mediating role of problematic internet use was not supported, indicating that it does not significantly alter the direct relationship between need satisfaction and marital quality. These findings challenge prior assumptions about the linear mediating effects of digital behavior and emphasize the possibility of other moderating variables such as personality traits, stress resilience, or external support systems (21,22). One notable strength of the study was the application of validated psychometric tools with high reliability coefficients, ensuring consistency and trustworthiness in measurement. The selection of a target sample comprising young married individuals aged 20–35 added theoretical value, as this life stage is critical for identity formation, relationship exploration, and the development of personal autonomy and intimacy needs. Moreover, the use of both dyadic and individual data points enriched the depth of analysis.

Despite its contributions, the study had several limitations. The sample size, although adequate for correlational analysis, was limited in diversity and geographical scope, being restricted to a specific population in Gujranwala. This homogeneity restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader populations with differing cultural, economic, or familial contexts. Additionally, the study relied solely on self-reported data through questionnaires, which are susceptible to social desirability bias and inaccurate self-assessment. The length of the questionnaires may have led to respondent fatigue, potentially compromising the accuracy of responses. The relatively short duration of data collection due to academic deadlines might have limited the depth of participant recruitment and engagement. Future research would benefit from a more expansive and demographically diverse sample to improve external validity. Incorporating qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews could also enhance data richness by capturing the nuanced experiences of married couples. Longitudinal designs would provide insights into how psychological needs and internet use patterns evolve over time within marital contexts. Employing more concise and culturally adapted assessment tools may improve response accuracy, and integrating behavioral measures of internet use would add objectivity to self-reported behaviors. Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of psychological need satisfaction in fostering marital harmony and the potential risks of digital overuse in undermining relational well-being. These insights offer valuable implications for counselors, therapists, and educators working with couples, highlighting the need to address unmet psychological needs and promote balanced digital habits as part of relationship support programs.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study highlighted a clear and meaningful association between the fulfillment of basic psychological needs and healthier marital adjustment among young married individuals. Although problematic internet usage was found to negatively impact marital adjustment, it did not significantly mediate the relationship between psychological needs and marital outcomes. These findings underscore the importance of nurturing autonomy, relatedness, and competence within marital relationships to foster emotional stability and relational harmony. The results offer practical insights for therapists, counselors, and relationship educators to design interventions that strengthen couples' psychological well-being while addressing emerging digital behaviors that may hinder intimate connection.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Author	Contribution
Sania Irshad*	Substantial Contribution to study design, analysis, acquisition of Data Manuscript Writing Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Anoosha Aman	Substantial Contribution to study design, acquisition and interpretation of Data Critical Review and Manuscript Writing Has given Final Approval of the version to be published

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