



## Research Paper

# Predicting Marital Conflicts Based on Internet Pornography Use and Emotional Maturity in Married Students



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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Married students, navigating the dual demands of academic pursuits and marital responsibilities, are particularly susceptible to relational discord.

**Objectives:** This study aimed to investigate the predictive roles of internet pornography use and emotional maturity in the occurrence of marital conflicts among this vulnerable population.

**Materials & Methods:** This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted during the 2023–2024 academic year on a convenience sample of 309 married university students in Shiraz, Iran. Data were gathered using the marital conflicts questionnaire (MCQ), the Internet pornography craving questionnaire (PCQ), and the emotional maturity scale. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficients and multiple linear regression model.

**Results:** There was a significant positive correlation between internet pornography use and marital conflicts ( $r=0.58$ ,  $P=0.001$ ). Conversely, emotional maturity showed a significant negative correlation with marital conflicts ( $r=-0.57$ ,  $P=0.001$  for males;  $r=-0.56$ ,  $P=0.001$  for females). The regression model, incorporating age and marriage duration, explained 51.4% of the variance. Significant predictors were internet pornography use ( $\beta=0.44$ ,  $P=0.001$ ), emotional maturity ( $\beta=-0.43$ ,  $P=0.001$ ), and age ( $\beta=-0.12$ ,  $P=0.03$ ), but not marriage duration ( $\beta=-0.09$ ,  $P=0.08$ ). Younger participants ( $\leq 30$  years) and those with shorter marriages ( $\leq 5$  years) reported elevated conflicts.

**Conclusion:** The results consistently demonstrate that internet pornography use is significantly linked to an increase in marital conflicts, whereas emotional maturity acts as a crucial protective factor, mitigating these conflicts. These findings highlight the imperative for developing educational and therapeutic interventions focused on fostering emotional skills and promoting responsible digital literacy among married students.

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## Introduction

Marital life for students presents unique challenges, as they juggle academic pressures with the responsibilities of partnership, often leading to heightened relational strain [1]. This dual role can precipitate marital conflicts, defined as disagreements, tensions, or misunderstandings between spouses that undermine relationship quality and satisfaction [2]. For married students, these conflicts are often exacerbated by competing demands such as time management, financial constraints, and differing expectations, which may lead to emotional disconnection or, in severe cases, relational dissolution [3, 4]. Understanding the factors that contribute to or mitigate these conflicts is critical for fostering resilient relationships among this population. This study focuses on two key factors influencing marital conflicts: Internet pornography use and emotional maturity. Drawing on attachment theory and social learning theory, this research posits that these factors shape relational dynamics through their impacts on expectations, emotional regulation, and communication.

Internet pornography use, defined as the consumption of sexually explicit online content, has become a pervasive issue with the potential to disrupt marital harmony [5]. Social learning theory suggests that exposure to idealize and unrealistic portrayals of relationships in pornography can shape individuals' expectations, leading to dissatisfaction when real-life partnerships fail to align with these depictions [6, 7]. Research indicates that frequent consumption may foster unrealistic sexual and relational standards, reduce intimacy, and increase conflict [5, 8]. For married students, who often face time and emotional resource constraints, such consumption may exacerbate feelings of inadequacy or neglect, further straining relationships [6]. Studies, such as those by Nikmanesh and Ganjali [5], have linked pornography use to attitudes favoring marital infidelity, while Manning [7] highlighted its broader impact on family dynamics. The accessibility of online content amplifies these effects, making it a critical factor to examine in this context.

Emotional maturity, encompassing the ability to regulate emotions, communicate effectively, and demonstrate empathy, serves as a counterbalancing factor [9]. Grounded in attachment theory, emotional maturity enables individuals to form secure relational bonds, navigate conflicts constructively, and resist external temptations [10]. Emotionally mature individuals are better equipped to manage stressors, employ empathy, and engage in solution-focused communication, reducing the

intensity of conflicts [11, 12]. Research by Yousefi and Baharvand Ahmadi [10] and Raisi Sheykhvisi et al. [13] underscores emotional maturity's role in fostering marital adjustment and stability. For married students, who face unique stressors, higher emotional maturity may mitigate conflicts arising from academic pressures or external influences like pornography [14]. Conversely, lower emotional maturity can exacerbate dissatisfaction and vulnerability to relational discord [15].

The interplay between these factors is particularly salient for married students, a population that remains understudied in the literature, especially within the Iranian context. Prior studies, such as those by Sadeghian et al. [1] and Boustani et al. [2], have highlighted the compounded stressors faced by this demographic, while international research, including Tan et al. [16], underscores the broader relevance of problematic internet use. Building on these perspectives, the present study investigates how internet pornography use and emotional maturity predict marital conflicts among married students in Shiraz, Iran. Specifically, the study hypothesizes that: 1) Internet pornography use is positively associated with marital conflicts, as it may foster unrealistic expectations and emotional disconnection; and 2) emotional maturity is negatively associated with marital conflicts, as it facilitates adaptive coping and effective communication. By examining these relationships, this study seeks to provide insights that can inform targeted interventions to promote healthier marital dynamics among students.

## Materials and Methods

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional research design to investigate the relationships between internet pornography use, emotional maturity, and marital conflicts among married students. The statistical population comprised all married students residing in Shiraz, Iran, during the academic year 2023-2024. A cluster sampling method was utilized to select participants. Five faculties were randomly selected from universities in Shiraz, followed by the random selection of five classrooms from each of these faculties. No specific sampling frame of married students was used; instead, all married students in selected classrooms were invited to participate, resulting in a non-probability convenience sample within the cluster framework. A priori power analysis for multiple regression with two predictors (internet pornography use and emotional maturity) indicated a minimum sample size of 207 to achieve a power of 0.80, with an  $\alpha$  of 0.05 and a medium effect size ( $f^2=0.15$ ), based on Cohen [17]. To ensure robustness, 330 questionnaires were distributed, yielding 309 valid responses after excluding

incomplete or corrupted forms. Inclusion criteria for participants were being currently married and enrolled as a student. Exclusion criteria included incomplete questionnaires or a history of diagnosed severe mental health disorders that could confound results. Only one spouse per couple completed the questionnaires, which was a limitation in capturing dyadic perspectives. Throughout the research process, all ethical considerations were meticulously observed, ensuring the confidentiality of participant information and guaranteeing anonymity.

## Procedure

Data collection was initiated after obtaining the necessary institutional approvals and fully explaining the research objectives to potential participants. Married students at [Azad University of Shiraz](#) were given questionnaires. Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Emphasis was placed on ensuring the privacy of participants' responses, which were analyzed at a macro level without revealing individual identities. The self-report questionnaires were completed by participants in a quiet setting to minimize distractions and encourage honest responses.

## Instruments

**Marital conflicts questionnaire (MCQ):** This questionnaire, developed by Boostanipoor and Zaker [18], consists of 42 items designed to assess seven dimensions of marital conflict: Decreased cooperation, decreased sexual relationship, increased emotional reactions, increased relations with one's own relatives, decreased relations with spouse's relatives, financial separation, and increased seeking child's support. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale, yielding a total score ranging from 42 to 210, with higher scores indicating greater conflict intensity. Lower scores indicate natural conflict levels. The reported reliability of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this instrument was 0.820 by its developers and 0.80 in a study by Mohammadi et al. [19]. In the current study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the MCQ was calculated at 0.88.

**Internet pornography craving questionnaire (PCQ):** The internet PCQ, developed by Kraus and Rosenberg [20], is an instrument specifically designed to quantify the intensity of an individual's craving and desire for internet pornography. Comprising 12 items, the PCQ utilizes a seven-point Likert scale for responses, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Higher scores indicate greater craving severity, with scores categorized as low or absent (12-36), moderate (36-60), or

high (60-84). Kraus and Rosenberg [20] reported robust psychometric properties for this instrument, including a high internal consistency coefficient and a moderate mean inter-item correlation of 0.46. Their original research also indicated a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability coefficient of 0.91. Further validation was provided by Darvish Molla and Nikmanesh [21], who established the concurrent validity of the Persian version of the PCQ at 0.82, correlating it with the Pornography Addiction Questionnaire. In the present study, the internal consistency of the PCQ was confirmed with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.86.

**Emotional maturity scale (EMS):** The EMS, developed by Jose and Swamy [22], comprises 48 items designed to assess various dimensions of emotional maturity. It includes subscales such as emotional instability (items 1-10), emotional regression (items 11-20), personality disintegration (items 21-30), social maladjustment (items 31-40), and lack of independence (items 41-48). Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "never" (1) to "very much" (5). Higher scores indicate lower emotional maturity. The internal consistency of this scale, as measured by Cronbach's  $\alpha$ , was reported as 0.75 [23]. In the current study, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the EMS was 0.84.

## Data analysis

Descriptive statistics, including Mean $\pm$ SD, and percent of maximum possible (POMP) scores, were calculated to summarize the demographic and study variables. POMP scores were computed as Equation 1 to facilitate comparisons across scales.

$$1. (\text{Mean-minimum possible score})/(\text{maximum possible score-minimum possible score}) \times 100$$

For inferential statistical analysis, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships between the variables, and t-tests were used to compare marital conflict mean scores across demographic subgroups. Simultaneous multiple linear regression analysis was performed to predict marital conflicts based on internet pornography use, emotional maturity, age, and marriage duration. The collected data were processed and analyzed using SPSS software, version 27.

## Results

The final sample comprised 309 married students, with 160 (51.8%) female students and 149 (48.2%) male students. The mean age of the participants was 33.02 $\pm$ 2.96

years. The mean duration of marriage was  $7.45 \pm 3.12$  years. Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for the primary study variables and the various subscales comprising marital conflicts. The findings indicate a total mean score of  $126.82 \pm 23.39$  (POMP=40.87%) for marital conflicts, suggesting moderate conflict levels. Internet pornography use registered a mean score of  $53.83 \pm 10.24$  (POMP=51.75%), indicating moderate craving, while emotional maturity exhibited a mean of  $144.90 \pm 26.60$  (POMP=50.38%), reflecting moderate emotional maturity. The skewness and kurtosis values for the majority of the variables were observed to fall within acceptable ranges, collectively suggesting that their distributions sufficiently approximated normality. This statistical characteristic supports the appropriateness of employing parametric methods in subsequent analyses.

Table 2 illustrates the Pearson correlation coefficients among the key research variables. The results indicate a significant positive correlation between internet pornography use and marital conflicts ( $r=0.58$ ,  $P=0.001$ ) for both males and females. This suggests that as the level of internet pornography use increases among married students, the intensity of marital conflicts tends to rise. Conversely, a significant negative correlation was found between emotional maturity and marital conflicts ( $r=-0.57$ ,  $P=0.001$  for males;  $r=-0.56$ ,  $P=0.001$  for females), implying that higher levels of emotional maturity are associated with a reduction in marital conflicts. There was no significant differences in marital conflict scores between males (Mean $\pm$ SD,  $125.67 \pm 22.94$ ) and females (Mean $\pm$ SD,  $127.89 \pm 23.82$ ;  $t=0.82$ ,  $P=0.41$ ). However, marital conflicts were significantly higher among younger participants ( $\leq 30$  years, Mean $\pm$ SD,  $131.45 \pm 24.12$ ) compared to older participants ( $>30$  years, Mean $\pm$ SD,  $124.12 \pm 22.58$ ;  $t=2.65$ ,  $P=0.008$ ). Similarly, those married  $\leq 5$  years (Mean $\pm$ SD,  $130.22 \pm 23.91$ ) reported higher conflicts than those married  $>5$  years (Mean $\pm$ SD,  $123.87 \pm 22.71$ ;  $t=2.31$ ,  $P=0.021$ ).

The results of the simultaneous multiple regression analysis, presented in Table 3, demonstrate that internet pornography use, emotional maturity, and age are significant predictors of marital conflicts. The overall regression model, including age and marriage duration, was significant ( $F=80.12$ ,  $P=0.001$ ), with a multiple correlation coefficient ( $R$ ) of 0.72 and an R-squared value of 0.514, meaning that 51.4% of the variance in marital conflicts can be explained by the predictors. Specifically, internet pornography use showed a significant positive effect, with an unstandardized coefficient of  $B=0.51$  ( $SE=0.05$ ,  $\beta=0.44$ ,  $P=0.001$ ), indicating that for each one-unit increase in the Internet PCQ score, marital conflict scores increased by

0.51 units, holding other variables constant. Emotional maturity exhibited a significant negative effect, with an unstandardized coefficient of  $B=-0.37$  ( $SE=0.04$ ,  $\beta=-0.43$ ,  $P=0.001$ ), suggesting that for each one-unit increase in the emotional maturity scale score (indicating lower emotional maturity), marital conflict scores decreased by 0.37 units. Age was also a significant predictor, with an unstandardized coefficient of  $B=-0.95$  ( $SE=0.44$ ,  $\beta=-0.12$ ,  $P=0.03$ ), indicating that older age was associated with a slight reduction in marital conflicts. Marriage duration was not a significant predictor ( $B=-0.67$ ,  $SE=0.38$ ,  $\beta=-0.09$ ,  $P=0.08$ ). Comparing the standardized coefficients, internet pornography use ( $\beta=0.44$ ) had the strongest association with marital conflicts, slightly stronger than emotional maturity ( $\beta=-0.43$ ), suggesting that it exerts a marginally greater influence on marital conflict scores relative to the other predictors in the model.

## Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the predictive roles of internet pornography use and emotional maturity in marital conflicts among married students, yielding significant insights into these complex relationships. The findings robustly indicate that internet pornography use is positively associated with marital discord. This aligns with a growing body of literature suggesting that problematic internet use, particularly the consumption of explicit online content, can detrimentally affect intimate relationships [16, 24]. In the Iranian context, Nikmanesh and Ganjali [5] found that pornography use correlates with attitudes toward infidelity, while internationally, Tan et al. [16] and Kuan et al. [24] highlight its role in reducing sexual satisfaction and well-being. The mechanisms underlying this relationship are multifaceted; repeated exposure to idealize or unrealistic sexual portrayals can cultivate distorted expectations of intimacy and sexual interactions within a marriage, leading to dissatisfaction when reality diverges from these perceived norms [24]. For married students in Shiraz, academic stress and limited time for intimacy may amplify these effects, as time spent on pornography may displace meaningful spousal interaction, fostering feelings of neglect or distrust [6]. Furthermore, the time and emotional energy invested in consuming internet pornography may displace genuine connection and communication with a spouse, fostering feelings of neglect, distrust, or inadequacy. This finding resonates with research by Dortaj et al. [25], who noted a link between social media use and marital issues, and Marino et al. [26], who examined craving as a predictor of problematic pornography use. The consistency of these results underscores the necessity of addressing digital literacy within marital contexts.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for research variables

| Variables                                                    | Mean±SD      | POMP (%) | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Marital conflicts (total)                                    | 126.82±23.39 | 40.87    | 0.64     | 0.26     |
| Reduced cooperation                                          | 15.03±4.08   | 32.58    | 0.73     | 0.07     |
| Reduced sexual relationship                                  | 15.07±3.87   | 32.68    | 0.58     | 0.06     |
| Increased emotional reactions                                | 24.11±6.59   | 48.22    | 0.80     | 0.02     |
| Increased seeking child's support                            | 15.01±3.99   | 32.53    | 0.83     | 0.02     |
| Increased individual relations with relatives                | 18.25±3.98   | 40.63    | 0.64     | 0.09     |
| Reduced family relations with spouse's relatives and friends | 18.23±4.01   | 40.58    | 0.47     | 0.09     |
| Financial separation                                         | 21.13±5.03   | 45.28    | 0.73     | 0.13     |
| Internet pornography use                                     | 53.83±10.24  | 51.75    | 0.41     | 0.10     |
| Emotional maturity                                           | 144.90±26.60 | 50.38    | 1.34     | 0.11     |

POMP: Percent of maximum possible.

**Table 2.** Pearson correlation coefficients between marital conflicts, internet pornography use, and emotional maturity

| Variables                | Marital Conflicts | P     |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------|
| Internet pornography use | 0.58              | 0.001 |
| Emotional maturity       | -0.57             | 0.001 |



Conversely, the study found a significant negative correlation between emotional maturity and marital conflicts, establishing emotional maturity as a protective factor. This outcome is consistent with prior research highlighting the critical role of emotional competence in fostering healthy and resilient marital relationships [13, 27]. Iranian studies, such as Raisi Sheykhevisi et al. [13], emphasize emotional maturity's role in mediating marital adjustment, while international research by Purba and Kusumati [27] links it to marriage readiness. For married students, emotional maturity is particularly crucial due to their unique stressors, such as balancing academic

deadlines and household responsibilities [1]. Emotionally mature individuals can navigate these challenges by employing empathy, frustration tolerance, and constructive communication, transforming potential conflicts into opportunities for relational growth [11]. Their capacity for empathy and understanding allows them to address disagreements without escalating tension, transforming potential conflicts into opportunities for growth and deeper connection [27].

**Table 3.** Simultaneous linear regression analysis for predicting marital conflicts

| Variables                | Unstandardized Coefficients (B) | SE    | Standardized Coefficients (β) | t     | P     |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Internet pornography use | 0.51                            | 0.05  | 0.44                          | 10.20 | 0.001 |
| Emotional maturity       | -0.37                           | -0.04 | -0.43                         | -9.98 | 0.001 |
| Age                      | -0.95                           | 0.44  | -0.12                         | -2.16 | 0.001 |
| Marriage duration        | -0.67                           | 0.38  | -0.09                         | -1.76 | 0.08  |

SE: Standard error.





The integrated analysis, particularly the regression model, demonstrated that both internet pornography use and emotional maturity collectively account for a substantial portion of the variance in marital conflicts. The inclusion of age and marriage duration in the model revealed that younger students and those with shorter marriages experience higher conflicts, likely due to less established coping mechanisms or greater exposure to digital influences [3]. This interplay suggests that while internet pornography use acts as an exacerbating force, emotional maturity serves as a mitigating one, particularly in the high-pressure context of married student life in Shiraz, where cultural expectations around marriage add further complexity [1]. The interplay suggests that even in the presence of stressors like internet pornography, a higher degree of emotional maturity can buffer its negative impacts by fostering adaptive coping mechanisms and bolstering relational resilience. This complex dynamic is particularly relevant for married students who face unique academic and social pressures, making their relationships vulnerable. Thus, interventions aimed at promoting emotional intelligence and responsible digital habits could simultaneously reduce risk factors and enhance protective ones.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its focused examination of these two critical variables within the under-researched population of married students, especially within the specific cultural context of Shiraz, Iran. Practically, the findings underscore the imperative for comprehensive psychoeducational programs at universities and family counseling centers. These programs could include workshops on emotional regulation and conflict resolution, tailored to the dual demands of academic and marital life, and campaigns to promote responsible internet use, such as limiting exposure to harmful content through digital literacy training [5]. Universities could integrate these into student support services, while counseling centers could offer couple-based interventions to enhance emotional maturity. Policymakers could support these efforts by funding accessible mental health resources for students, addressing both cultural and digital influences on marriage [1]. Cultivating emotional skills can empower individuals to better manage their emotions and relationship dynamics, while awareness campaigns regarding the potential pitfalls of internet pornography can foster healthier digital habits. Such preventative and therapeutic interventions are crucial for strengthening marital bonds and mitigating conflicts in this particularly susceptible demographic.

## Conclusion

This study provides robust evidence that both internet pornography use and emotional maturity are significant predictors of marital conflicts among married students. The findings consistently demonstrate that higher levels of internet pornography use are associated with increased marital discord, while greater emotional maturity serves as a crucial protective factor, mitigating the incidence and intensity of such conflicts. The combined predictive power of these variables underscores their profound impact on relational well-being within this demographic. These results highlight the critical importance of fostering emotional competence and promoting responsible digital literacy among married students to enhance marital stability and satisfaction. Consequently, the findings advocate for the development and implementation of targeted educational and therapeutic interventions aimed at cultivating healthy emotional regulation and informed internet consumption habits within this population.

Despite its valuable contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. Its cross-sectional design precludes the establishment of causal relationships. The reliance on self-report measures introduces the possibility of social desirability bias. The use of only one spouse's responses limits insights into dyadic dynamics, potentially underestimating conflict levels, as partner perspectives may differ. The convenience sampling method from Shiraz, Iran, limits generalizability, particularly to non-Iranian contexts with different cultural norms around marriage and technology use. Future research could benefit from longitudinal designs, qualitative methods for richer insights, and dyadic studies capturing both spouses' perspectives to better understand relational dynamics. Including mediating variables like sexual satisfaction or cultural beliefs could further elucidate these relationships.

## Ethical Considerations

### Compliance with ethical guidelines

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the [Islamic Azad University, Arsanjan Branch](#) (Code: IR.IAU.A.REC.1404.031).

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### Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study, data collection and analysis, interpretation of the results, and drafting of the manuscript. Each author approved the final version of the manuscript for submission.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

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