Parental Supervision of Adolescents’ internet use: Does family functionality and parents’ smartphone addiction influence these practices?

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Introduction: Early internet usage is a risk factor for addiction, and adolescents still present low levels of self-control, therefore new approaches need to be created towards a more conscious digital use. The present study aims to explore if family functionality and parents smartphone addiction predict the level of parental supervision towards their children’s technology use.

Method: Overall, 596 Portuguese parents of adolescents (101 men), aged 18-68 years old (M=44.3;SD=5.97) participated. Smartphone addiction (Smartphone Addiction Scale-short version), family functionality (General Functioning – a subscale of Family Assessment Device) and parental supervision (Internet Parenting Style Instrument, including both Parental Warmth-PW and Parental Control-PC) were assessed.

Results: The structural model revealed a sufficient fit (X2/df=2.678;CFI=.860;TLI=.851;RMSEA=.053). Better family functionality predicted both higher PW (β=.299; p<.001) and PC (β=.165; p<.001). The higher the smartphone addiction, the lower PC was (β=-.100; p=.030). Younger parents presented both higher PC (β=-.193; p=.001) and PW (β=-.136; p<001). More literate parents performed higher PC (β=.184; p<.001) and PW (β=.238; p<.001). Finally, parents with a lower number of children displayed higher PW (β=.091; p=.023).

Conclusion: A good family functionality is associated with parental internet supervision, which is a protective practice. However, parents who have smartphone addiction (being themselves absorb by a dysfunctional behaviour), with older age (possibly more distant from youth’s internet usage patterns) and less literate (and possibly with less access to information) seem to implement these behaviours less frequently. This study might shed some light on which parents might need information and/or psychoeducation on the matter.