



# Preventing internet misuse and its impact on adolescent health: The role of emotional intelligence

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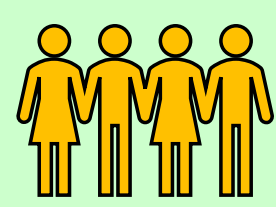
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## Background

In recent years, there has been an increase in the use of ICTs in adolescents (Smahel et al., 2020; Unicef, 2021). Although Internet use brings a number of benefits to daily lives, such as facilitating communication, it can also have negative consequences for well-being if adolescents have a problematic internet use (PIU) (e.g., depressive and anxiety symptoms, insomnia or feelings of loneliness; Liu et al., 2022; Machimbarrena et al., 2019; Tóth-Király et al., 2021). The **Compensatory Internet Use Theory** (CIUT; Kardefelt-Winther, 2014) **may help to understand** some of the reasons **why adolescents may experience PIU and how this PIU may be maintained over time**. This theory suggests that adolescents may use the Internet as a way or strategy to manage the various stressful events they experience and the emotions these experiences provoke (Klavina et al., 2021; Wartberg et al., 2021). This, in turn, increases the likelihood that they will end up having a PIU and suffer its negative consequences on psychological adjustment (Lai et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2022). Consequently, this maladjustment may lead to greater PIU over time (Tóth-Király et al., 2021). Thus, numerous studies have examined possible factors that help both to prevent a PIU in adolescents and its negative impact on health. **Emotional intelligence** (EI) is one of the factors that **has shown evidence** not only in **promoting psychosocial functioning in adolescents** (Arrivillaga et al., 2022), but also in **helping to prevent a problematic use of technologies** (Chen et al., 2021). Thus, some studies show that people with a higher level of EI development tend to have less problematic use of technologies (e.g., internet, smartphone or social media) (Arrivillaga et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021; Hsieh et al., 2019; Kircaburun et al., 2019). Nevertheless, **despite these findings, more research is needed** to further investigate the potential benefits of EI on PIU and well-being, especially with longitudinal studies.

## Objetives

To analyse **prospectively** the **relationship between EI and PIU** in adolescents, **via two mediators: PIU in time 1 and depressive symptoms in time 2**.



**491 adolescents** ♀ 297 ♂ 194

12-18 years-old ( $M_{age} = 13.43$ ;  $SD = 1.17$ )

Students from Year 7 to Year 11 4 educational centres



Declaration of Helsinki (2013)

Ethical Committee of the University of Malaga (169-2023-H)

## Method



**TIME 1**

- **Wong Law Emotional Intelligence Scale** (WLEIS-S; Extremera et al., 2019)
- **Internet Addiction Test** (IAT; Puerta-Cortés et al., 2012)



**TIME 2 [5 months later]**

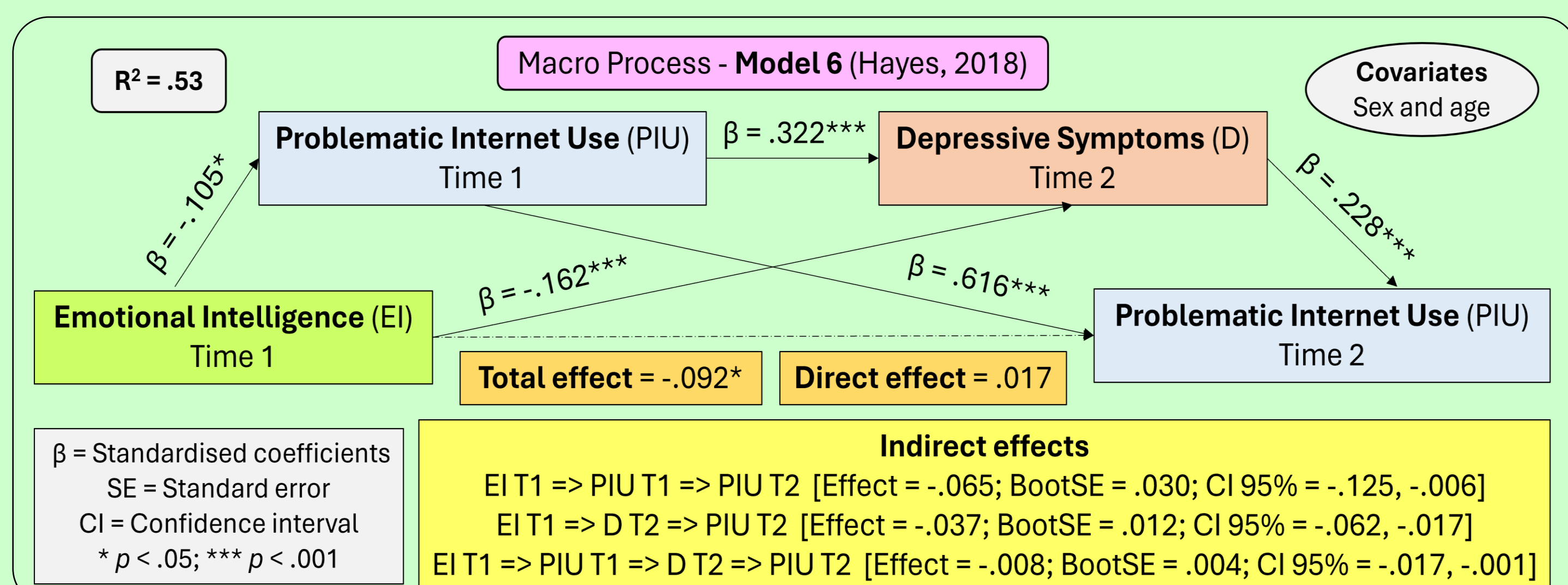
- **Internet Addiction Test** (IAT; Puerta-Cortés et al., 2012)
- **Subscale of depression of Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales** (DASS-21; Bados et al., 2005)

## Results

- ❖ Adequately reliability indices and significant Pearson correlations in line with expectations (see Table).
- ❖ The results of a serial mediation analysis showed that **EI was negatively related to PIU at time 1 which leads to lower depressive symptoms at time 2 and, subsequently, lower PIU at time 2** (see Figure).

Reliability, descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations				
Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Emotional intelligence (T1)	(.85)			
2. Problematic internet use (T1)	-.11*	(.87)		
3. Depressive symptoms (T2)	-.23***	.36***	(.91)	
4. Problematic internet use (T2)	-.10*	.70***	.45***	(.89)
Medium	4.59	43.21	0.83	40.43
Standard deviation	0.97	12.77	0.83	12.97
Minimum - Maximum	1 - 7	20 - 100	0 - 3	20 - 100

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Cronbach's alpha in brackets. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2



## Discussion

- According to Kardefelt-Winther's CIUT (2014) and previous studies (e.g., Arrivillaga et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021) **these findings corroborate the potential benefits of EI development and training in adolescent to prevent PIU, as well as its negative impact on adolescents' psychological adjustment over time**.
- In addition, they suggest that **EI could be a useful resource to include in intervention programmes not only to promote good coping with the difficulties adolescents face in their daily lives and to improve their well-being**. It would also be useful **to promote a responsible use of technologies** in them and to enjoy the benefits of these technologies in a healthy way.

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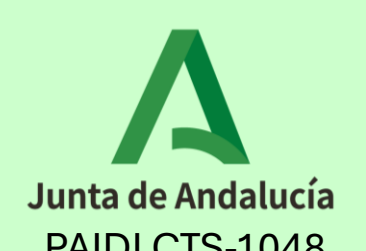
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