

## EFFECTIVENESS OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROGRAM TO REDUCE SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** Social media addiction is a growing concern among adolescents worldwide, with potentially serious impacts on psychological health, academic performance, and social relationships. This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a psychological program designed to reduce social media addiction among tenth-grade students in Duhok Governorate, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The study employed a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test measurements. The sample consisted of 23 tenth-grade students (aged 15 years and above) who exhibited high levels of social media addiction according to a validated scale. The intervention was a 12-session psychological program based on cognitive-behavioral approaches, delivered twice weekly for 45 minutes per session. The program incorporated techniques such as self-control training, rational thinking skills, time management, relaxation exercises, and positive reinforcement strategies. Data were collected using the Social Media Addiction Scale (Younis, 2016) and analyzed using t-tests and Cohen's effect size calculations. Findings revealed that participants had high levels of social media addiction at baseline ( $M=64.52$ ,  $SD=5.17$ ), significantly higher than the hypothetical mean ( $t=4.18$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Following the intervention, there was a statistically significant decrease in addiction levels ( $M=53.43$ ,  $SD=10.13$ ;  $t=5.24$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), with a large effect size (Cohen's  $d=1.09$ ). The results indicate that the psychological program was effective in reducing social media addiction among the participants. The study demonstrates that structured psychological interventions based on cognitive and behavioral approaches can effectively reduce social media addiction among adolescents. The findings suggest that implementing similar programs in educational settings could be beneficial in addressing the growing problem of social media addiction among students, particularly in regions where digital literacy education and awareness about risks of excessive social media use are limited.

**Keywords:** Social Media Addiction, Psychological Intervention, Adolescents, Kurdistan Region, Self-Control

**Abstrak:** Kecanduan media sosial menjadi perhatian yang berkembang di kalangan remaja di seluruh dunia, dengan dampak serius yang berpotensi pada kesehatan psikologis, kinerja akademik, dan hubungan sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas program psikologis yang dirancang untuk mengurangi kecanduan media sosial di kalangan siswa kelas sepuluh di Kegubernuran Duhok, Wilayah Kurdistan Irak. Studi ini menggunakan desain kuasi-eksperimental dengan pengukuran pra-tes dan pasca-uji. Sampel terdiri dari 23 siswa kelas sepuluh (berusia 15 tahun ke atas) yang menunjukkan tingkat kecanduan media sosial yang tinggi menurut skala yang divalidasi. Intervensi tersebut adalah program psikologis 12 sesi berdasarkan pendekatan kognitif-perilaku, disampaikan dua kali

seminggu selama 45 menit per sesi. Program ini menggabungkan beberapa teknik seperti pelatihan pengendalian diri, keterampilan berpikir rasional, manajemen waktu, latihan relaksasi, dan strategi penguatan positif. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan Skala Kecanduan Media Sosial (Younis, 2016) dan dianalisis menggunakan uji-t dan perhitungan ukuran efek Cohen. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa remaja memiliki tingkat kecanduan media sosial yang tinggi pada awal ( $M = 64,52, SD = 5,17$ ), secara signifikan lebih tinggi dari rata-rata hipotetis ( $t = 4,18, p < 0,05$ ). Setelah intervensi, terjadi penurunan tingkat kecanduan yang signifikan secara statistik ( $M = 53,43, SD = 10,13; t = 5,24, p < 0,05$ ), dengan ukuran efek yang besar (Cohen's  $d = 1,09$ ). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa program psikologis efektif dalam mengurangi kecanduan media sosial di antara para remaja. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa intervensi psikologis terstruktur berdasarkan pendekatan kognitif dan perilaku dapat secara efektif mengurangi kecanduan media sosial di kalangan remaja. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa menerapkan program serupa dalam pengaturan pendidikan dapat bermanfaat dalam mengatasi masalah kecanduan media sosial yang berkembang di kalangan peserta didik, terutama di daerah di mana pendidikan literasi digital dan kesadaran tentang risiko penggunaan media sosial yang berlebihan terbatas.

**Kata Kunci:** Kecanduan Media Sosial, Intervensi Psikologis, Remaja, Wilayah Kurdistan, Pengendalian Diri.

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technologies has led to unprecedented changes in how people interact with each other and the world around them. Social media platforms have become an integral part of daily life for billions of people worldwide, with particularly high adoption rates among adolescents and young adults. While these platforms offer numerous benefits such as enhanced connectivity, information sharing, and entertainment, their excessive use has raised significant concerns among researchers, educators, and mental health professionals. Social media addiction, characterized by compulsive use, inability to control usage time, and withdrawal symptoms when unable to access these platforms, has emerged as a serious issue affecting various aspects of adolescents' lives (Sabah & Al-Shujairi, 2018).

In recent years, social media addiction has gained recognition as a form of behavioral addiction with characteristics similar to substance addiction. The American Psychiatric Association has acknowledged internet gaming disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) as a condition requiring further research, and many researchers consider social media addiction to fall within the same category of behavioral addictions (Younis, 2016). Studies have shown that excessive social media use can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including decreased academic performance, sleep disturbances, anxiety, depression, poor self-esteem, and deterioration in real-life social relationships (Abu Hadrous, 2016).

Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to developing social media addiction due to their developmental stage, which is characterized by identity formation, peer influence, and the need for social validation. During this critical period, adolescents are highly susceptible to the rewards and reinforcements provided by social media platforms, such as likes, comments, and followers, which can trigger dopamine release in the brain's reward system (Mahmoud et al., 2021). Additionally, the fear of missing out (FOMO) and the desire to maintain a digital presence can drive adolescents to spend excessive amounts of time on these platforms (Hilal, 2020).

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq, like many other regions undergoing rapid digital transformation, has witnessed a significant increase in internet and social media use among its youth population. The proliferation of smartphones, improved internet connectivity, and the absence of comprehensive digital literacy education have contributed to the rise of social media addiction among adolescents in this region (Hamid, 2022). Cultural factors, limited recreational alternatives, and the challenging socio-political environment may further exacerbate this issue, as social media offers an escape from reality and a means of connecting with the broader world.

Educational institutions in the Kurdistan Region face the challenge of addressing social media addiction among students while lacking effective intervention strategies

based on scientific evidence (Abdullah et al., 2024). There is a pressing need for the development and implementation of programs that can help students develop healthier relationships with social media and technology in general (Al-Miqdadi, 2014). In this context, recent studies also highlight that integrating innovative technologies like mobile learning (m-learning) can enhance student engagement and well-being, suggesting that mobile-based interventions may offer effective tools for managing digital behaviors (Qolamani et al., 2024). M-learning, by facilitating seamless learning across contexts and promoting autonomy, could potentially support digital literacy and reduce dependency on unproductive social media usage.

This study aims to address this gap by developing and testing a psychological program to reduce social media addiction among tenth-grade students in Duhok Governorate. The program is based on cognitive-behavioral approaches, which have shown effectiveness in addressing various behavioral addictions (Al-Astal, 2011). It incorporates techniques such as self-control training, rational thinking skills, time management, and alternative activity engagement to help students develop healthier digital habits.

The study's objectives include: (1) Designing a psychological program to reduce social media addiction among tenth-grade students; (2) Applying the social media addiction scale developed by Younis (2016) to measure addiction levels before and after the program implementation; (3) Identifying the most commonly used social media platforms among tenth-grade students; and (4) Examining differences in social media addiction based on gender (male-female) and academic specialization (scientific-literary).

The research is limited to tenth-grade students in Duhok Governorate's schools during the academic year 2024-2025. It employs a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test measurements to evaluate the effectiveness of the psychological program in reducing social media addiction. The study tests the following hypotheses: (1) There are no statistically significant differences at the level of (0.05) between the mean scores of the experimental group in the pre-test and post-test; (2) There are no statistically significant differences at the level of (0.05) in the pre-test and post-test based on gender; and (3) There are no statistically significant differences at the level of (0.05) in the pre-test and post-test based on academic specialization.

This research is significant as it addresses a contemporary challenge facing educational institutions and contributes to the limited literature on interventions for social media addiction, particularly in the context of the Kurdistan Region. The findings may inform the development of prevention and intervention strategies in schools and provide valuable insights for educators, counselors, and policymakers concerned with the digital wellbeing of adolescents.

## Literature Review

Social media platforms have transformed communication, information sharing, and social interaction worldwide. However, this digital revolution has brought with it the concerning phenomenon of social media addiction, particularly among adolescents. Social media addiction is generally defined as an excessive concern about social media, driven by an uncontrollable urge to log on to or use social media, and devoting so much time and effort to social media that it impairs other important life areas (Basiouni, 2009). While not formally recognized as a clinical disorder in major diagnostic manuals, researchers have identified behavioral patterns analogous to substance addictions, including salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, and relapse (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011).

Younis (2016) defined social media addiction as "the inability to control the desire to reduce the use of social media sites and wasting time on these sites and excessive use of them." This definition highlights the loss of control that characterizes addictive behavior. Similarly, Sabah and Al-Shujairi (2018) described it as "excessive use of social media that causes mood changes, social withdrawal, feelings of distress and loneliness, which often appear when the individual stops using these sites."

Research indicates high prevalence rates of social media addiction among adolescents globally. A study found that 79% of university students showed signs of problematic Facebook use (Arnout, 2007). In the Arab world, studies have reported prevalence rates ranging from 27% to 47% among adolescents (Maatouq & Kareem, 2012). Several risk factors for social media addiction have been identified in the literature. Developmental factors make adolescents particularly vulnerable as they navigate identity formation and seek peer validation (Mahmood & Mohammed, 2024). Psychological factors such as low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and poor impulse control have been associated with problematic social media use (Al-Hawari, 2021).

Social factors including peer pressure, fear of missing out (FOMO), and poor family relationships also contribute to addiction risk (Taha, 2022). Additionally, environmental factors such as easy access to the internet, availability of smartphones, lack of parental supervision, and limited alternative recreational activities increase vulnerability to social media addiction (Al-Ammar, 2014). In the context of the Kurdistan Region, these factors may be compounded by socio-political challenges, limited recreational infrastructure, and gaps in digital literacy education.

Research has documented extensive negative impacts of social media addiction on various aspects of adolescents' lives. Academically, excessive social media use has been linked to poor academic performance, reduced concentration, and increased procrastination. Andreassen & Pallesen (2014) found a significant decrease in grade point averages among students addicted to Facebook compared to non-addicted peers. Psychological impacts include increased rates of depression, anxiety, stress, and

sleep disturbances (Darrar, 2013). Social impacts involve deterioration in face-to-face social skills, reduced family interactions, and social isolation.

Mahmoud et al., (2021) found a strong correlation between social media addiction and social isolation among adolescents, with heavy users experiencing greater isolation than moderate users. Physical health impacts include eye strain, neck and back pain, headaches, and disrupted sleep patterns due to prolonged screen time (Andreassen & Pallesen, 2014). Several studies have also reported associations between social media addiction and reduced life satisfaction, lower self-efficacy, and poorer overall well-being (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011).

Despite the widespread negative effects of excessive digital use, the experience of online education during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed nuanced insights. In a study on social studies students, Qolamani (2022) highlighted that online learning could still foster motivation and academic engagement when properly structured and supported. These findings suggest that digital tools, when implemented effectively, can serve as both a risk and a remedy for technology-related behavioral challenges, depending on the context and content of usage.

Several theoretical frameworks have been proposed to explain social media addiction. The behavioral perspective, championed by theorists like Skinner, views social media addiction as a learned behavior maintained through operant conditioning, where likes, comments, and notifications serve as intermittent reinforcers that strengthen addictive patterns (Andreassen et al., 2016). The psychodynamic perspective suggests that social media addiction represents an escape response to frustrations and psychological pressures, with social media serving as a substitute pleasure fulfilling unmet psychological needs (Cash et al., 2012).

The cognitive perspective, associated with theorists like Beck, argues that maladaptive cognitions and irrational beliefs about social media underlie addictive behavior. Davis (2001) proposed that poor self-regulation and distorted cognitions about the self and the world contribute to problematic internet use. Social cognitive theory suggests that people learn addictive behaviors through observation and modeling, with social media addiction developing through observing others' heavy use and reinforcement patterns.

Research on interventions for social media addiction is still emerging, but several approaches have shown promise. Cognitive-behavioral interventions focus on identifying and modifying maladaptive thoughts and behaviors related to social media use. Abu Hadrous (2016) found that a group counseling program based on cognitive-behavioral theory effectively reduced Facebook addiction among adolescent girls, with significant decreases in addiction levels compared to a control group. Mindfulness-based interventions emphasize awareness of triggers and

patterns of use, helping individuals develop more conscious relationships with technology.

Time management and digital literacy programs teach skills for balanced technology use and critical consumption of online content. Family-based interventions involve parents in monitoring and guiding their children's social media use while improving family communication and activities. Recently, technological approaches such as usage-tracking apps, screen time limits, and digital wellbeing features have been incorporated into intervention programs. Hamid (2022) found that integrating thought-stopping techniques effectively reduced social media addiction levels among middle school students, demonstrating the potential of combining psychological approaches with practical tools.

Despite growing research interest, significant gaps remain in the literature on social media addiction interventions, particularly in non-Western contexts. Most studies have focused on prevalence and correlates rather than intervention effectiveness. Few studies have examined culturally adapted interventions for specific populations, such as Kurdish adolescents. Additionally, there is limited research on the long-term sustainability of intervention effects and the specific components contributing to successful outcomes. The current study addresses these gaps by developing and testing a comprehensive psychological program for reducing social media addiction among tenth-grade students in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Drawing on cognitive-behavioral principles while incorporating culturally relevant elements, this study contributes to the understanding of effective intervention strategies in a previously understudied context.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Method**

The researcher employed a quasi-experimental method due to its suitability with the nature of the research variables, to study the phenomenon of social media addiction and determine the effectiveness of the psychological educational program. The experimental group underwent a pre-test, followed by program implementation, then a post-test to measure the program's effectiveness in reducing social media addiction.

### **Research Population**

The research population consisted of tenth-grade students (fourth secondary) in four randomly selected schools within the administrative boundaries of Duhok city center: Media School for Girls (97 students), Bazara Mixed School (114 students), Warkeh School for Girls (100 students), and Bhashwa School for Boys (64 students), with a total of 375 students. The results of applying the addiction scale showed that the overall mean for the schools was 70.34, indicating a high level of social media addiction.

## **Research Sample**

The researcher followed four steps to determine the sample. First, addiction presence was verified using a t-test. Second, respondents' scores were divided into three categories. Third, an exploratory question was posed about hours of usage, and using chi-square test (chi value = 27.1 greater than tabulated value 16.9), Media School was identified as having the highest addiction level. Fourth, 23 female students from Media School who spent 7-12 hours on social media were selected.

## **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

Participating students were selected according to the following inclusion criteria: (1) being officially registered in Media School for Girls, (2) demonstrating high levels of social media addiction according to the used scale, (3) spending at least 7 hours daily on social media platforms, (4) obtaining parental consent for program participation. Exclusion criteria included: (1) student's unwillingness to participate, (2) students suffering from other psychological disorders that might affect their response to the program, (3) students unable to commit to attending program sessions.

## **Sample Description**

The researcher found that 20 (87%) of the sample owned mobile phones while 3 (13%) did not and used phones belonging to siblings. Regarding parents' educational level, 52.2% held elementary education certificates while 4.3% had institute degrees or higher.

## **Research Tools**

### **First: Social Media Addiction Scale**

The researcher adopted Younis's (2016) scale consisting of 30 items with three response options (yes, somewhat, no).

Psychometric properties of the scale:

1. Face validity: The scale was presented to 12 reviewers, and an agreement rate of 83.33% was adopted for item retention.
2. Discriminative power: The scale was administered to an exploratory sample of 110 students, and the calculated t-value for each item was greater than the tabulated value (2.00) at level (0.05).
3. Item-scale relationship: Correlation coefficient values were greater than the tabulated value (0.91) at level (0.05).
4. Scale reliability: Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.722.
5. Translation validity: The scale was translated from Arabic to Kurdish and its validity was verified.

## **Second: Psychological Educational Program**

The researcher developed a psychological educational program to reduce social media addiction, based on theoretical framework, previous studies, and expert consultation. The program aims to help students reduce social media use and increase their psychological and social integration. Program validity was verified by presenting it to 12 reviewers, and the final version consisted of 12 sessions, each lasting 45 minutes, conducted twice weekly.

### **Research Ethics**

The researcher obtained official approval from the Directorate of Scientific and Postgraduate Affairs at the University of Zakho number (1125) dated (12/1/2022) to facilitate program implementation. Approval was also obtained from the General Directorate of Education in Duhok Governorate number (18837) dated (12/8/2024) and another approval from the Eastern Duhok Education Directorate number (1610) dated (2/10/2024) to allow program implementation in participating schools. Additionally, approval was obtained from the Planning Directorate number (11874) dated (12/21/2021) to assist in conducting the research and facilitating its implementation in schools while adhering to scientific research ethics and information confidentiality.

### **Statistical Methods Used**

1. Independent samples t-test: To find discriminative power of items.
2. Pearson correlation coefficient: To find item-scale relationship.
3. Cronbach's alpha equation: To find scale reliability.
4. One-sample t-test: To determine addiction level in the exploratory sample.
5. Range: To determine length of addiction phenomenon categories.
6. Chi-square equation: To find schools with highest addiction levels.
7. Paired samples t-test: To verify the second main hypothesis.
8. Cohen's equation: To find effect size of program effectiveness.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

#### **First Hypothesis**

Is there a statistically significant difference at level (0.05) between the arithmetic mean of social media addiction for the sample as a whole and the hypothetical mean?

To verify this hypothesis, the researcher extracted the arithmetic mean and standard deviation for the sample data on social media addiction, then applied the one-sample t-test and recorded the results in Table 1.

**Table 1.** One-Sample t-test for Social Media Addiction Scale

Scale	N	Hypothetical Mean	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value		Significance
					Calculated	Tabulated	
Pre-addiction	23	60	64.52	5.17	4.18	1.71 (0.05) (22)	Significant

Table 1 shows that the mean scores of the sample (23 students) on the social media addiction scale was 64.52 with a standard deviation of 5.17, which is higher than the hypothetical mean of 60. When comparing this mean with the hypothetical mean using the one-sample t-test, the calculated t-value was 4.18, greater than the tabulated t-value of 1.71 at significance level 0.05 and degrees of freedom 22, indicating statistically significant differences between the two means in favor of the arithmetic mean. This indicates that the sample suffers from high levels of social media addiction. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, indicating statistically significant differences between the arithmetic mean and hypothetical mean in the social media addiction scale for the sample.

### Second Hypothesis

Is there a statistically significant difference at level (0.05) between sample scores in pre-test and post-test applications on the social media addiction reduction scale?

To verify this hypothesis, the researcher extracted the arithmetic mean and standard deviation for both test scores, then applied the paired samples t-test and recorded the results in Table 2.

**Table2.** Paired samples t-test Results for Pre and Post Applications for Reducing Social Media Addiction

Scale	Arithmetic Mean	N	Mean Difference	SD of Difference	t-value		Cohen's Effect Size
					Calculated	Tabulated	
Pre-test	64.52	23	11.08	10.13	5.24	2.07 (0.05) (22)	1.09
Post-test	53.43						

Table 2 shows that the mean scores for the sample in the pre-test was 64.52, while this decreased in the post-test to 53.43, a difference of 11.08 points with a standard deviation of 10.13. Using the paired samples t-test to examine the significance of this difference, the calculated t-value was 5.24, greater than the tabulated t-value of 2.07 at significance level 0.05 and degrees of freedom 22, indicating statistically significant differences between pre and post applications in favor of the post-test. The table also shows that the effect size was 1.09, a large effect according to Cohen's criteria,

indicating that the psychological educational program was effective in reducing social media addiction levels among the sample. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, indicating statistically significant differences between sample scores in pre and post applications on the social media addiction scale.

## **Discussion**

The research results reveal the prevalence of social media addiction among tenth-grade students (fourth secondary) in Duhok Governorate, and highlight the positive effectiveness of the applied psychological program in reducing these addiction levels. These results align with the general perception of challenges facing the contemporary generation in the era of digital and technological revolution, where social media has become an integral part of adolescent and youth life in various societies, including the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The high level of social media addiction among the sample reflects a social and cultural reality undergoing profound transformations in communication patterns and social relationships, where virtual interactions dominate real-world interactions, and society gradually transforms toward digitization in various life aspects. These social and cultural transformations have deep reflections on adolescents' psychological structure, contributing to pushing them toward excessive social media use in search of psychological and social satisfaction they may lack in reality.

The targeted age group in this research represents a critical period in psychological and social development, characterized by identity search, personality formation, and independence building. In the absence or weakness of recreational, cultural, and social alternatives in the surrounding environment, adolescents find social media a refuge that meets their needs for self-expression, communication with others, proving their existence, and building their identity, away from real-world constraints and family and societal supervision.

Environmental conditions play an important role in exacerbating this phenomenon, as parents' modest educational level, lack of sufficient awareness about technology overuse risks, and weak awareness programs in schools about healthy and balanced social media use, all contribute to worsening the problem. Internet and smartphone proliferation and easy access, in the absence of appropriate supervision, represents a fertile environment for digital addiction behaviors to grow among adolescents. Freedman noted in this context that excessive social media use causes mental habit changes and comprehension loss in students, leading to fragmented thinking quality, which agrees with what the researcher observed through interaction with the sample.

The interactive nature of social media, and the deliberate design of these platforms to enhance addiction through reinforcement and reward mechanisms and continuous

notifications, makes adolescents more susceptible to addiction. The current study results show that students' mean scores on the social media addiction scale in the pre-test were high, indicating the clear spread of this phenomenon among tenth-grade students in Duhok Governorate. This increase may be attributed to numerous psychological, social, and cultural factors, foremost being the psychological characteristics of adolescence, surrounding social and cultural conditions, and the nature of contemporary life where technology, internet, and social media have become an essential part of adolescent and youth life.

On the other hand, the study results reveal the effectiveness of the applied psychological program in reducing social media addiction levels among the sample, highlighting the importance of systematic psychological interventions based on scientific foundations in addressing this phenomenon. Results showed a significant decrease in students' mean scores on the social media addiction scale after program implementation, indicating the program's effectiveness in achieving its objectives. This effectiveness is attributed to several factors, including the theoretical foundations on which the program was based, varied techniques and methods it included, systematic organization of sessions, positive atmosphere prevailing in sessions, good relationship between researcher and students, positive interaction among group members, continuous follow-up, and homework assignments that contributed to enhancing learning transfer to students' natural environment.

The applied psychological program targeted cognitive, behavioral, and social aspects of personality, making it more effective in achieving its objectives. Cognitively, the program focused on modifying irrational thoughts related to social media use and developing rational thinking skills. Behaviorally, it focused on developing self-control and time management skills. Socially, it focused on enhancing real-world social relationships and interaction with others in the real world. Educational and psychological literature has indicated the importance of targeting these three aspects in addiction treatment programs in general, and social media addiction in particular, explaining the effectiveness of the applied psychological program in reducing social media addiction levels among the sample.

The researcher attributes the high level of social media addiction among the sample to a set of interconnected and overlapping factors, primarily developmental characteristics of the age stage tenth-grade students go through, characterized by identity search, independence, and peer communication, which social media largely provides. Additionally, rapid technological development and smartphone proliferation and easy internet access, amidst weak family and school supervision, increases opportunities for excessive social media use. Furthermore, psychological and social emptiness experienced by many students, and weak recreational and cultural alternatives available in the surrounding environment, drives them to the virtual world in search of psychological and social satisfaction. Parents' modest

educational level, as shown by sample data, may reduce their awareness of social media overuse risks, consequently weakening parental supervision over their children's use of these platforms. Finally, absence of awareness programs in schools about healthy and balanced social media use, and lack of media and digital literacy topics in curricula, makes students more vulnerable to addiction on these platforms.

These results align with Mahmoud et al., (2021) study confirming a strong relationship between social media addiction and social isolation, showing that individuals who frequently use social media are more exposed to social isolation than those who use it less. They also agree with Hilal's (2020) study indicating that social media influences students' values and attitudes, with females surpassing males in their attitudes and social values being affected by social media. They also correspond with Younis's (2016) study confirming a correlational relationship between social media addiction and psychological loneliness. They agree with Basiouni's (2009) findings that individual social media use may reach a stage of inability to stop usage, affecting most of the individual's activities and normal life practice.

Regarding the psychological program's effectiveness in reducing social media addiction levels, results showed statistically significant differences between pre and post measurements in favor of the post measurement, confirming the applied program's effectiveness. This result can be interpreted in light of the theoretical foundations and therapeutic techniques on which the program was based, which varied between cognitive, behavioral, and social techniques. The program aimed to modify irrational thoughts related to social media use, develop self-control and time management skills, enhance real-world social relationships, and direct students toward useful alternative activities. The program included varied sessions targeting different personality aspects, starting with introducing social media addiction, its symptoms, causes, and effects, through modifying irrational thoughts and developing self-control and time management skills, to enhancing real-world social relationships and directing students toward useful alternative activities.

During program sessions, the researcher used varied techniques such as discussion and dialogue, brainstorming, role-playing, homework assignments, positive reinforcement, feedback, video presentations, relaxation, and other techniques that contributed to achieving program objectives. The systematic organization of sessions, gradual content presentation, continuous follow-up, and homework assignments all contributed to achieving the desired program objectives. Additionally, the positive atmosphere prevailing in sessions, good relationship between researcher and students, and positive interaction among group members were facilitating factors in program success.

The researcher attributes the psychological program's effectiveness in reducing social media addiction levels among the sample to the integrated systematic program design

based on solid theoretical foundations derived from behavioral and cognitive theories, variety of techniques and methods used, focus on increasing students' awareness of social media addiction phenomenon and its negative effects, modifying irrational thoughts related to using these platforms, developing time management and self-control skills, emphasizing the importance of real-world social relationships, plus continuous follow-up and homework assignments that contributed to enhancing learning transfer to students' natural environment. The nature of the sample's age stage, adolescence characterized by flexibility and susceptibility to change and modification, contributed to program success. Additionally, sample members' commitment to attending program sessions and completing homework assignments, positive interaction during sessions, and desire to overcome social media addiction, all contributed to program success. The diversity of evaluation methods used during the program, from pre and post evaluation and follow-up, helped ensure achievement of program objectives. Notably, the program applied in the current study was distinguished by its comprehensiveness and targeting of various personality aspects, focus on the real causes of social media addiction, and provision of realistic and feasible alternatives to this addiction, making it more effective in achieving its objectives.

These results agree with Abu Hadrous's (2016) study proving the effectiveness of a group counseling program based on cognitive behavioral theory in reducing social media addiction disorders (Facebook) among a sample of adolescent girls, showing a significant decrease in addiction levels in the experimental group compared to the control group. They also agree with Hamid's (2022) study confirming the effect of thought-stopping technique in reducing social media addiction levels among middle school students. They also align with Sahin's (2017) study indicating a negative relationship between social media addiction and life satisfaction, where higher addiction correlates with lower life satisfaction. They agree with Yu et al.'s (2016) study showing increased social media addiction levels among university students and decreased self-efficacy. They also align with Hall & Parsons's (2001) indication that reinforcement technique used collectively can weaken the effects of reinforcers driving individuals to use social media, by providing alternative reinforcers such as recreational, family, or social activities.

In light of these results, it can be said that systematic psychological interventions based on scientific foundations represent an effective strategy in addressing social media addiction among adolescents, especially when based on established scientific theories and including varied techniques targeting cognitive, behavioral, and social personality aspects. This calls for generalizing such programs more broadly in various educational institutions, considering them part of preventive and therapeutic strategies for dealing with psychological and social challenges facing the youth generation in the digital era. These results also highlight the importance of awareness

about social media addiction risks, the necessity of including media and digital literacy topics in curricula, and training students on healthy and balanced technology use in general and social media in particular. Additionally, these results highlight the importance of family and school roles in limiting social media addiction phenomenon through appropriate supervision, providing suitable recreational, cultural, and social alternatives, enhancing real-world family and social relationships, and directing students toward beneficial activities.

## CONCLUSIONS

The current study found high levels of social media addiction among tenth-grade students in Duhok Governorate and proved the effectiveness of the psychological educational program based on behavioral and cognitive theories in reducing these addiction levels. Various techniques used in the program such as discussion, dialogue, brainstorming, role-playing, homework, and reinforcement contributed to its success. Results revealed that increasing student awareness about addiction risks, developing self-control and time management skills, and enhancing real-world social relationships represent important factors in limiting this phenomenon. Environmental conditions such as parents' educational level and weak recreational alternatives were found to contribute to increased addiction levels. Accordingly, the researcher recommends the necessity of educating students and families about social media addiction risks through seminars and lectures, implementing psychological programs based on scientific theories in schools, and training school counselors on how to deal with this problem. She also recommends providing appropriate recreational and cultural alternatives for students, including media and digital literacy topics in curricula, and enhancing real-world family and social relationships. The researcher suggests conducting future studies including: comparing addiction levels between different educational stages, studying the relationship between addiction and psychological variables such as anxiety and depression, effectiveness of counseling programs based on other theories, addiction's effect on academic achievement, family and school roles in prevention, relationship between parenting styles and addiction, effectiveness of counseling programs for parents, and longitudinal studies to track phenomenon development. These conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions emphasize the importance of addressing social media addiction from a comprehensive perspective considering psychological, behavioral, social, and environmental factors, and investing in adolescents' capacity for change through integrated intervention programs targeting thought modification, skill development, and providing positive alternatives. Cooperation between school, family, and community represents the cornerstone in any effort to confront this growing phenomenon, requiring combined efforts from various educational, social, and media institutions to limit it and direct youth toward healthy and balanced technology use

in general and social media in particular, achieving maximum benefits while avoiding negative effects on psychological and physical health, academic achievement, and social relationships.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The researcher declares that there are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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