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Article

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation as a Mediator and Gender as a Moderator in the Relationship Between Digital Game Addiction and Life Satisfaction Among Adolescents

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Abstract

Background: Digital game addiction has emerged as a significant behavioral concern among adolescents, with potential implications for well-being. Understanding the mechanisms through which digital game addiction affects life satisfaction and how these mechanisms may differ by gender is important for targeted interventions. **Aims:** This study aimed to investigate the mediating role of difficulties in emotion regulation and the moderating role of gender in the relationship between digital game addiction and life satisfaction among adolescents. **Method:** The sample consisted of 458 Turkish adolescents (232 females, 50.7%) aged between 14 and 18 years ($M = 16.27$). Participants completed the Game Addiction Scale for Adolescents – Short Form, the Life Satisfaction Scale, and the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale – 8. **Results:** Digital game addiction was found to have a significant negative association with life satisfaction. Difficulties in emotion regulation significantly mediated the relationship between digital game addiction and life satisfaction. Furthermore, gender moderated this mediation effect, with difficulties in emotion regulation being more pronounced among males than females. **Conclusion:** The findings highlight the importance of emotional regulation in understanding the negative impact of digital game addiction on adolescents' life satisfaction, particularly among males. These results suggest the need for gender-sensitive approaches in interventions aimed at improving emotion regulation skills and reducing problematic gaming behavior.

Keywords: digital game addiction; life satisfaction; difficulties in emotion regulation; adolescents; gender differences

1. Introduction

Life satisfaction is a subjective indicator of well-being that expresses an individual's satisfaction with their life. Adolescence, in particular, is a period of rapid and complex changes in terms of physical, cognitive and emotional development, and is therefore a critical stage in determining life satisfaction (Russo-Netzer & Tarrasch, 2024). Research has shown that life satisfaction in adolescence is not merely a temporary state of happiness, but also plays a protective role in terms of future psychological health, academic achievement, social relationships, and coping skills (Dezhapoun,

2025; Liu et al., 2021). Supporting life satisfaction at an early age not only has a protective effect on mental health but also prevents individuals from resorting to negative coping strategies (Chiang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021). Indeed, studies have shown that adolescents with low life satisfaction are more likely to exhibit aggression, substance use, and risky behaviours (Hanniball et al., 2018; Manna et al., 2023). Therefore, addressing the concept of life satisfaction during adolescence is important for developing strategies that support mental health at both the individual and societal levels (Erdian & Hidayat, 2024; Kekkonen et al., 2020).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Digital Game Addiction and Life Satisfaction

In recent years, with the rapid advancement of technology, digital games have become quite widespread, especially among teenagers, and have become an indispensable part of daily life. Easy access to mobile devices, the strengthening of internet infrastructure, and the social interaction enabled by online games are among the primary factors contributing to the appeal of these games (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Martin-Subero & Diez-Quevedo, 2016). Adolescents find digital games appealing because they can interact with others more easily than in face-to-face situations, cope with real-life problems through interactions in the game world, gain the respect of other players due to their good gaming skills, and thus fulfil their need for self-actualisation (Li & Wang, 2013). However, the appeal of the virtual world also carries the risk of digital game addiction (Kaya et al., 2024). Digital game addiction is defined as an uncontrollable and repetitive desire to play games to a degree that may negatively affect an individual's social, academic, professional, or personal functioning (Pontes & Griffiths, 2015). Additionally, addiction symptoms include cognitive and behavioural indicators such as mental preoccupation with the game, restlessness when unable to play, failed attempts to control gaming, and neglect of social obligations, rather than merely the amount of time spent in front of a screen (Montag et al., 2021).

Adolescence, in particular, is considered a vulnerable stage for addictive behaviours because it is a period when individuals struggle with developmental tasks such as identity development, social belonging and autonomy, experience frequent emotional fluctuations and are more prone to risky behaviours (Steinberg, 2008). Excessive time spent by adolescents on digital games leads to the development of addictive tendencies and causes them to exhibit serious behavioural problems (Frangos et al., 2011). Research has found that digital game addiction is positively associated with factors such as anxiety (Mehroof & Griffiths, 2010), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Başgul et al., 2020), obsessive-compulsive disorder (Starcevic & Aboujaoude, 2017), depression (Andreassen et al., 2016) and social anxiety (Karaca et al., 2020). However, it has been found to be negatively associated with emotion regulation skills, school attachment (Kang, 2017), life satisfaction (Makas & Koç, 2025; Taş et al., 2022), autonomy and need for relationship (Kaya et al., 2024). In this context, it can be argued that individuals with digital game addiction may experience negative outcomes in many dimensions of their lives, which may also affect their overall life satisfaction levels.

With the widespread use of digital games, gaming addiction has become a problem that has serious effects on individuals' psychological and social lives (Yaman et al., 2020). This situation is particularly significant among young people and young adults, as it constitutes an important risk factor affecting fundamental well-being, such as life satisfaction (Makas & Koç, 2025; Purwaningsih & Nurmala, 2021). Life satisfaction is a cognitive evaluation process that reflects an individual's satisfaction in different areas of life, such as family, work, friendships, and health (Frisch, 2016). Adolescence, in particular, is a period of rapid emotional, social, and cognitive development; therefore, life satisfaction is considered an important developmental indicator (Purwaningsih & Nurmala, 2021). Indeed, Proctor and colleagues (2009) emphasised that high life satisfaction in adolescents is closely related to positive variables such as self-esteem, perceived social support, academic achievement, and overall psychological well-being. However, excessive engagement in digital games, i.e., digital game addiction, is considered an important behavioural risk factor that

threatens these positive sources of life satisfaction (Baysak et al., 2020). It has been observed that individuals who become addicted to digital games redirect their time and attention resources from academic, social, and family responsibilities to the virtual world (Griffiths, 2009). This situation can lead to weakened connections with real life, social isolation, decreased academic performance, and ultimately reduced life satisfaction (Bargeron & Hormes, 2017).

A review of the literature reveals that uncontrolled digital gaming has been found to cause a decrease in satisfaction from social relationships and a weakening of psychological well-being (Çan et al., 2020; Kircaburun et al., 2019). Studies conducted in parallel with this finding have also revealed a negative relationship between digital game addiction and life satisfaction (Filipovič et al., 2023; Kircaburun et al., 2019; Makas & Koç, 2025; Tomaszek et al., 2020). Similarly, Bargeron and Hormes (2017) demonstrated that individuals diagnosed with gaming addiction have lower life satisfaction and higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Research indicates that individuals with low life satisfaction tend to turn to digital games more frequently and attempt to fulfil their unmet psychological needs through these games (Çelik et al., 2022; Giardina et al., 2024; Kaya et al., 2024). In this context, low life satisfaction acts as a risk factor that triggers digital game addiction, while the continuation of addiction can further reduce an individual's life satisfaction, creating a negative cycle (Bargeron & Hormes, 2017). In conclusion, digital game addiction is considered a variable that negatively affects the level of life satisfaction, which is of fundamental importance in the psychosocial development of adolescents.

Hypothesis 1: *Digital game addiction in adolescents negatively predicts life satisfaction.*

2.2. The Mediating Role of Difficulties in Emotion Regulation

Various psychological factors influence the relationship between digital game addiction and life satisfaction. One of these factors is difficulty in emotional regulation. difficulty in emotional regulation is defined as the inability to effectively control one's emotional responses, develop appropriate coping strategies, and cope with negative emotions (Erez & Gordon, 2024). Recent studies have shown that digital game addiction has a detrimental effect on difficulty in emotional regulation. Although digital games provide short-term emotional relief, they can weaken emotional intelligence components such as emotional awareness, impulse control, and coping skills in the long term (Maroney et al., 2019; Rho et al., 2018). Emotional capacities that are developing during adolescence can be harmed by excessive engagement with digital games (Loudoun et al., 2024).

Difficulty in emotional regulation can negatively affect both individual life satisfaction and social relationships. Indeed, studies have shown that difficulty in emotional regulation is positively related to life satisfaction and that difficulty in emotional regulation reduces life satisfaction (González et al., 2023; Mittal, 2020). Research has found that individuals who are unable to regulate their emotions healthily experience more anxiety and depression and, consequently, have lower life satisfaction (Basyouni & Keshky, 2021; Hebert, 2017). In this regard, digital game addiction indirectly reduces life satisfaction by causing individuals to experience difficulties in regulating their emotions. In summary, while digital game addiction is an important factor that negatively affects life satisfaction, difficulty in emotional regulation emerges as an effective mediator variable in understanding this relationship. Additionally, studies indicate that other psychological variables may influence the relationship between digital game addiction and life satisfaction. These include variables such as depression (Shimono, 2021), self-compassion (Jiang et al., 2022), and psychological flexibility (Schumacher, 2023). Each of these variables is an important factor influencing life satisfaction, but they are often directly related to emotion regulation skills.

Hypothesis 2: *Difficulty in emotional regulation mediates the relationship between digital game addiction and life satisfaction*

2.3. The Moderating Role of Gender

The relationship between digital game addiction and life satisfaction may vary depending on the individual's psychological characteristics as well as gender differences. Studies show that this relationship is stronger and more negative in males. One of the main reasons for this is that males have lower emotional regulation skills than females (Wang et al., 2022). Emotional regulation skills are critical for an individual's ability to cope with stress, manage negative emotions, and develop healthy behavior patterns. Girls' more developed skills in this area may protect them to some extent from the negative effects of gaming addiction on life satisfaction (Cudo et al., 2020). A study found that female gamers regulate their emotional responses more harmoniously and thus feel the effects of gaming addiction on life satisfaction to a lesser extent (Dong & Potenza, 2022). In addition, males spend more time on games and exhibit higher levels of addiction (Rohilla, 2018). This situation may lead to greater harm to their life satisfaction (Gaetan et al., 2012; Yazici & Kumcagiz, 2021). Furthermore, when men play games primarily for competition, success, and escape motivations, combined with deficiencies in emotional regulation skills, this can elevate addiction to a more dysfunctional level (Estupiñá et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2022). All these findings indicate that gender plays a moderating role in the relationship between gaming addiction and life satisfaction, particularly in male individuals, where this relationship is stronger and more negative (Cudo et al., 2020; Bonnaire & Baptista, 2019). Girls' advanced emotion regulation skills make them more resilient to the psychological consequences of digital game use, while boys' weakness in this skill amplifies the negative effects of gaming addiction on life satisfaction (Estévez et al., 2017; Müller & Bonnaire, 2020).

Hypothesis 3: *Difficulty in emotional regulation fully mediates in boys, while partially mediating in girls.*

2.4. Present Study

Today, digital game addiction has significant consequences for psychological well-being, especially among adolescents. Considering that adolescence is a critical period in terms of susceptibility to digital addictions, it is not surprising that there are many studies on the relationship between digital game addiction and life satisfaction in adolescents. However, the emotional mechanisms and gender differences in this relationship make this study valuable. In this context, studies aiming to explain the relationship between digital game addiction and life satisfaction are of critical importance in understanding individuals' emotional and social functioning. The present study aims to contribute significantly to the literature by examining difficulty in emotional regulation as a mediating variable and gender as a moderating variable in order to gain a deeper understanding of this relationship. The findings of the current study may contribute to psychoeducational programs targeting life satisfaction in adolescents by emphasizing the importance of emotion regulation skills and gender differences. Additionally, it may create the potential to offer more effective and comprehensive intervention strategies related to adolescents' life satisfaction to parents, educators, and mental health professionals.

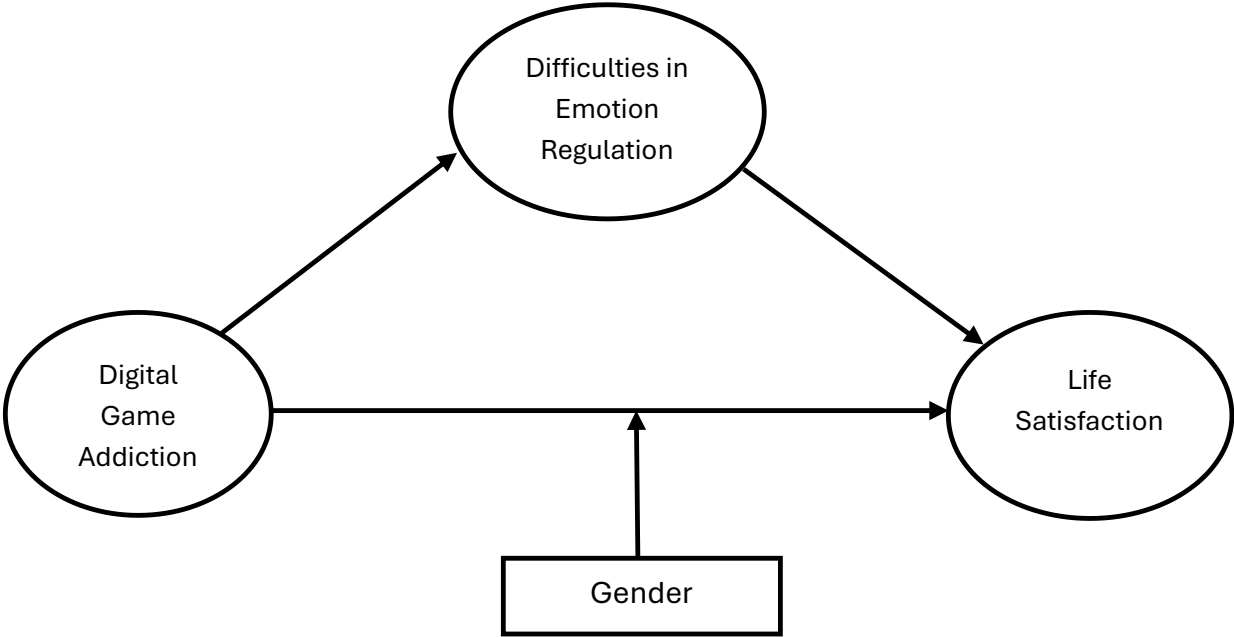


Figure 1. The proposed hypothetical model.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and Procedure

The study included 458 Turkish adolescents. A total of 226 (49.3%) of the participants were male, while 232 (50.7%) were female. The ages of the participants ranged from 14 to 18, with a mean age of 16.27 years. A total of 136 (29.7%) of the participants were in the 9th grade, 139 (30.3%) were in the 10th grade, 104 (22.7%) were in the 11th grade, and 79 (17.2%) were in the 12th grade. After obtaining permission from the University Ethics Committee, two schools were randomly selected from among ten different high schools, and the students were reached. Within this framework, the selected high schools were visited in April 2025, and after providing information about the study to the students, those who volunteered were informed that they could answer the questions after obtaining Informed Parental Consent Forms signed by their parents, as they were under the age of 18. Additionally, information was provided regarding the absence of any incentives and the confidentiality of the data. Three days after these briefings, the schools were revisited to collect the responses. Data collection tools were not provided to students who did not consent to participate or whose parents did not sign the consent form.

3.2. Instruments

The Game Addiction Scale for Adolescents-Short Form: It was developed by Anlı and Taş (2018) to determine the addiction levels of adolescents in terms of their gaming behaviour. The scale consists of a total of 9 items, a single dimension, and a Likert-type rating ranging from 1 to 5. As the scores obtained from the scale increase, the level of addiction increases. The reliability value of the scale is $\alpha = .81$. Additionally, the scale's fit indices are $\chi^2 (27) = 2.514$, CFI = .96, GFI = .97, RMSEA = .054, and NFI = .94.

Life Satisfaction Scale: It was used to determine the level of satisfaction of adolescents with their general life experiences. The scale [Original: Diener et al. (1985), Turkish: Dağlı and Baysal (2016)] consists of five items, a single dimension, and a 5-point Likert scale. It has been stated that as the scores obtained from the scale increase, the level of satisfaction of adolescents also increases. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the adaptation to Turkish culture showed good fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.17$, RMSEA = .030, AGFI = .97, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .019, GFI = .97). The Cronbach's Alpha value of the scale is .88.

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-8: It has been used to determine the emotional regulation difficulties experienced by adolescents. Scale Scale [Original: Penner et al. (2022), Turkish: Ekşi and Erik (2023)] 8 items, 4 factors (Purpose, impulse, rejection and strategy) and a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicate greater difficulty. Cronbach's alpha coefficients range from .87 for the entire scale to .68 to .77 for the subscales. The results of the DFA analysis indicate that the general fit indices ($\chi^2/df = 3.05$; GFI = .97; NFI = .96; TLI = .95; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .075) are adequate.

3.3. Data Analysis

SPSS 27.0 and AMOS 24 statistical software packages were used for the analysis of the research. First, the normality of the data was determined by examining the normal distribution graph, skewness, and kurtosis values. Then, Pearson Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships. Structural Equation Modelling was established to examine the mediating role of emotion regulation difficulty (M) in the relationship between game addiction (X) and life satisfaction (Y). In the final stage, the moderating effect of gender was examined.

4. Results

4.1. Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 shows that life satisfaction is negatively correlated with game addiction ($r = -.45, p < .001$), goal ($r = -.54, p < .001$), impulse ($r = -.53, p < .001$), non-acceptance ($r = -.50, p < .001$), and strategy ($r = -.58, p < .001$). Game addiction is positively related to goal ($r = .41, p < .001$), impulse ($r = .45, p < .001$), non-acceptance ($r = .48, p < .001$), and strategy ($r = .39, p < .001$). Impulse, one of the subscales of emotion regulation difficulty ($r = .70, p < .001$), is positively related to acceptance ($r = .70, p < .001$) and strategy ($r = .78, p < .001$). One of the subdimensions of emotion regulation difficulty, impulse, is positively related to acceptance ($r = .71, p < .001$) and strategy ($r = .72, p < .001$). Acceptance is positively related to strategy ($r = .72, p < .001$).

Table 1. The Results of Correlation Analysis.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Life Satisfaction	1					
2. Game Addiction	-.455**	1				
3. Goal	-.538**	.407**	1			
4. Impulse	-.526**	.454**	.700**	1		
5. Non-acceptance	-.499**	.480**	.698**	.707**	1	
6. Strategy	-.567**	.387**	.779**	.717**	.723**	1
Mean	14.83	20.42	5.85	5.52	4.98	5.44
SD	5.49	8.02	2.10	2.36	2.35	2.29
Skewness	-.17	.64	.30	.37	.48	.36
Kurtosis	-1.18	-.43	-.81	-1.00	-.92	-.85

** .p< 0.01

The results presented in Table 1 show that the skewness values range from 0.64 to -0.17, while the kurtosis values range from -1.18 to -0.43. These values are between +1.5 and -1.5, which is within the acceptable range for normality (Mayers, 2013). Before testing the mediating model, the level of digital game addiction's impact on life satisfaction was determined. The findings are presented in Figure 2.

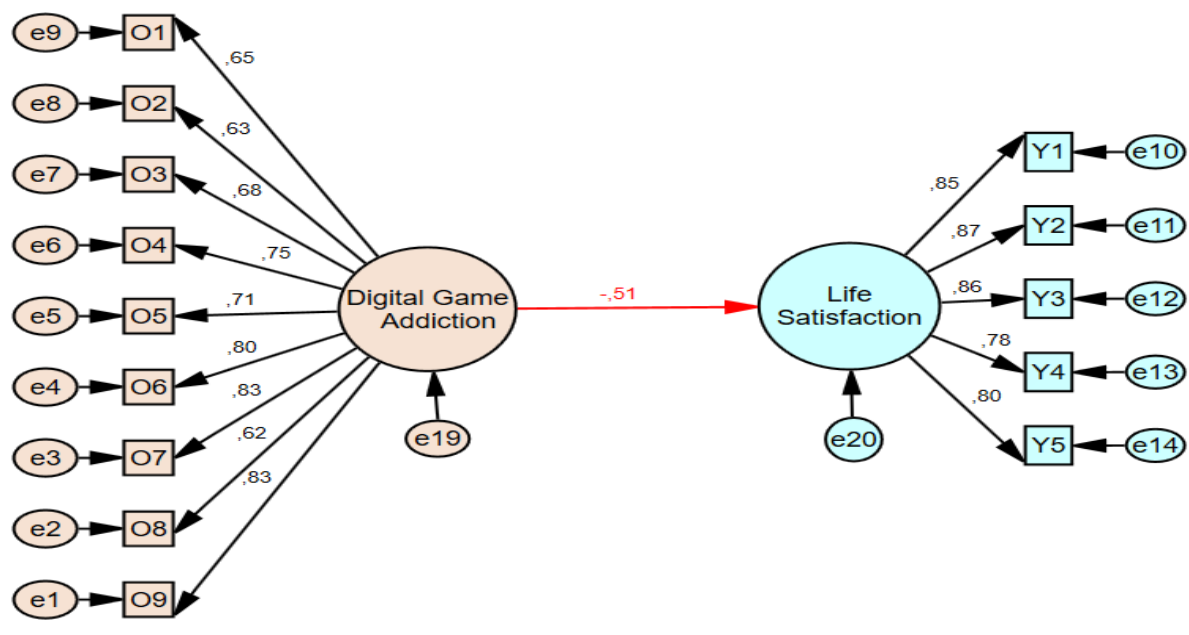


Figure 2. The Relationship between Digital Game Addiction and Life Satisfaction (Stage 1).

Figure 2 shows the association between digital game addiction and life satisfaction was ($r = -.51$, $p < .001$). The fit indices for Figure 2 were found to be adequate with $\chi^2/df = 4.60$, CFI = .932, GFI = .897, TLI = .932, and SRMR = .049 (Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Hooper et al., 2008; Hu & Bentler, 1998; Marsh & Hau, 1996; Wheaton et al., 1977).

4.2. Testing for Moderated Mediation

Acceptance ranges for fit indices specified by relevant statistics experts in studies (Browne & Cudeck, 1992; Hooper et al., 2008; Hu & Bentler, 1998; Marsh & Hau, 1996; Wheaton et al., 1977) and the results of the fit indices obtained for the mediator model tested in the current study are demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Acceptance Ranges for Fit Indices and Fit Indices Obtained from the Mediator Model Test in Female and Male.

Indices	Perfect fit limit	Acceptable fit limit	Scale Indices	Result
χ^2/DF	0-2.5	≤ 5	2.62	Acceptable
RMSEA	$\leq .05$	$\leq .08$	.06	Acceptable
SRMR	$\leq .05$	$\leq .08$	.05	Perfect
CFI	$\geq .95$	$\geq .90$	.92	Acceptable
GFI	$\geq .90$	$\geq .85$	.85	Acceptable
IFI	$\geq .95$	$\geq .90$	.92	Acceptable

Examining the fit indices for the mediator model as seen in Table 2, the fit indices of the current research model are at an acceptable level. When the findings presented in Figure 2 (Stage One) of the model showing the mediating effects of the study are compared with those presented in Figures 3 and 4, the relationship between digital game addiction and life satisfaction, when difficulty in emotional regulation is included as a mediating variable, was found to be $\beta = -.12$ for males and $\beta = -.33$ for females. The relationship between digital game addiction and life satisfaction decreased from $r = -.51$ to $\beta = -.12$ in males and became insignificant ($p > .07$). In females, it decreased to $\beta = -.33$ and its predictive power weakened. Thus, the effect of digital game addiction on life satisfaction became statistically insignificant in males (full mediation) when difficulty in emotional regulation was included in the model, while the relationship weakened (partial mediation) but did not disappear completely in females. Additionally, when comparing gender differences (Critical Ratios for

Differences), the differences between male and female groups were significant ($\beta_{\text{woman}} = -.33, \beta_{\text{man}} = -.12, C.R. = 2.560 > 1.96, p < .001$).

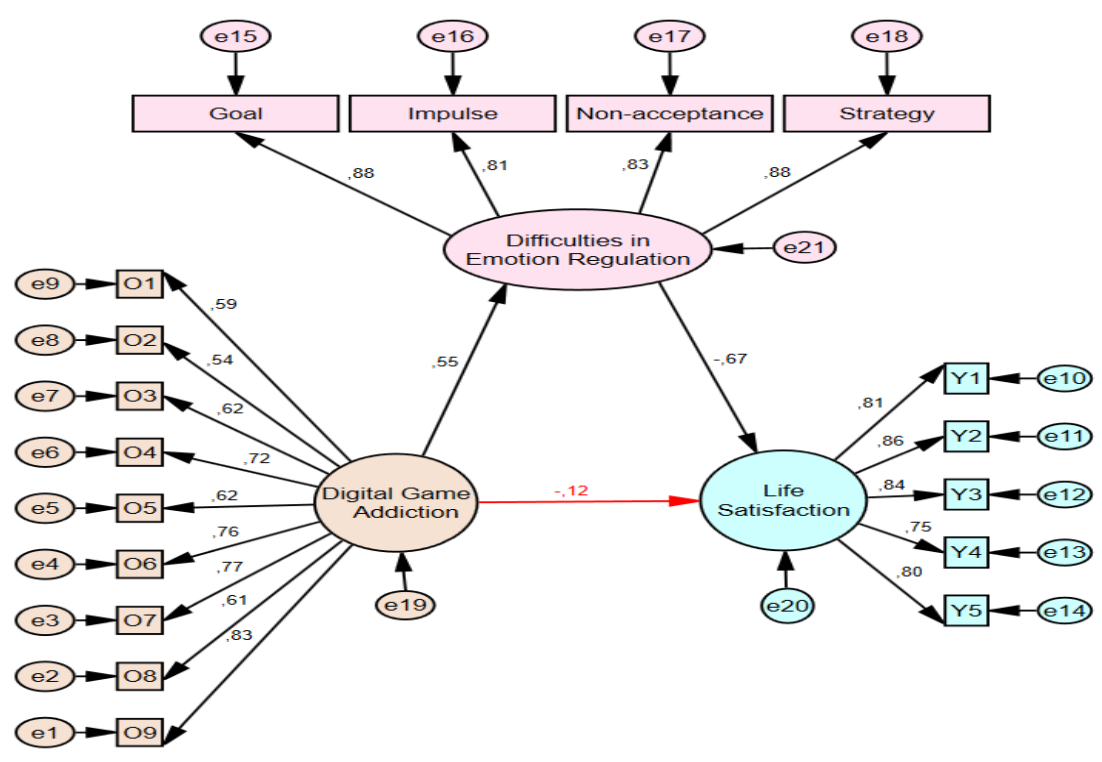


Figure 3. Moderated Mediation Effect of Male (Stage 2).

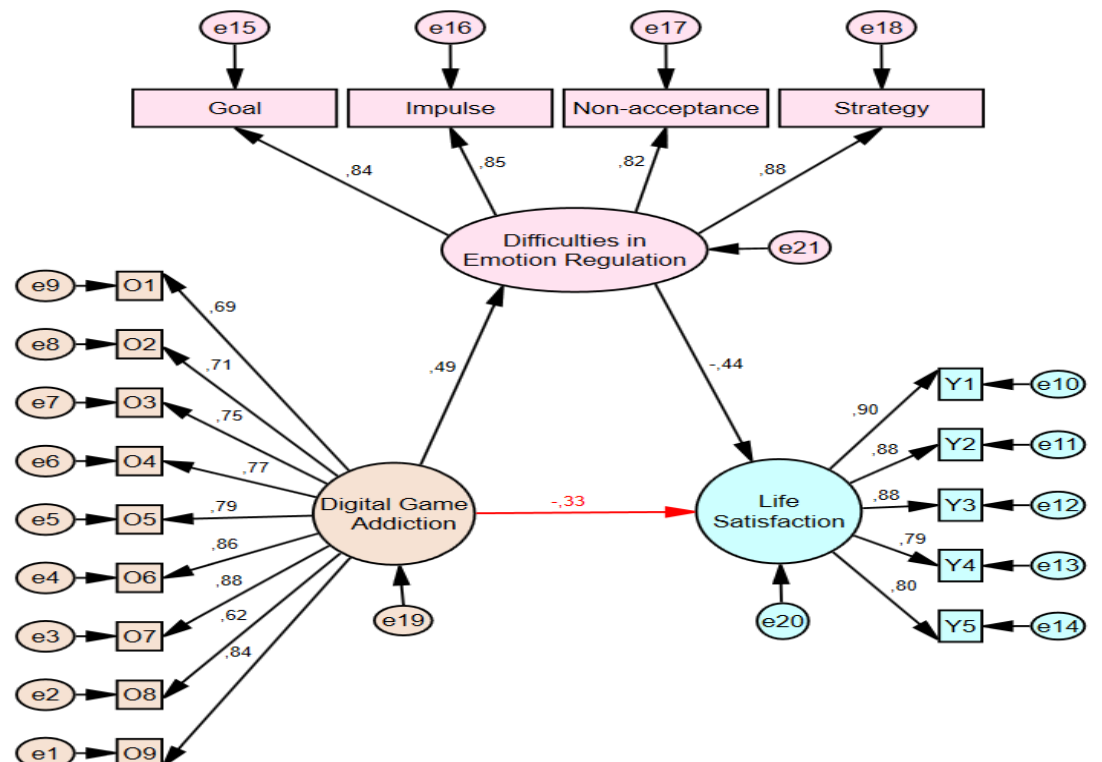


Figure 4. Moderated Mediation Effect of Female (Stage 2).

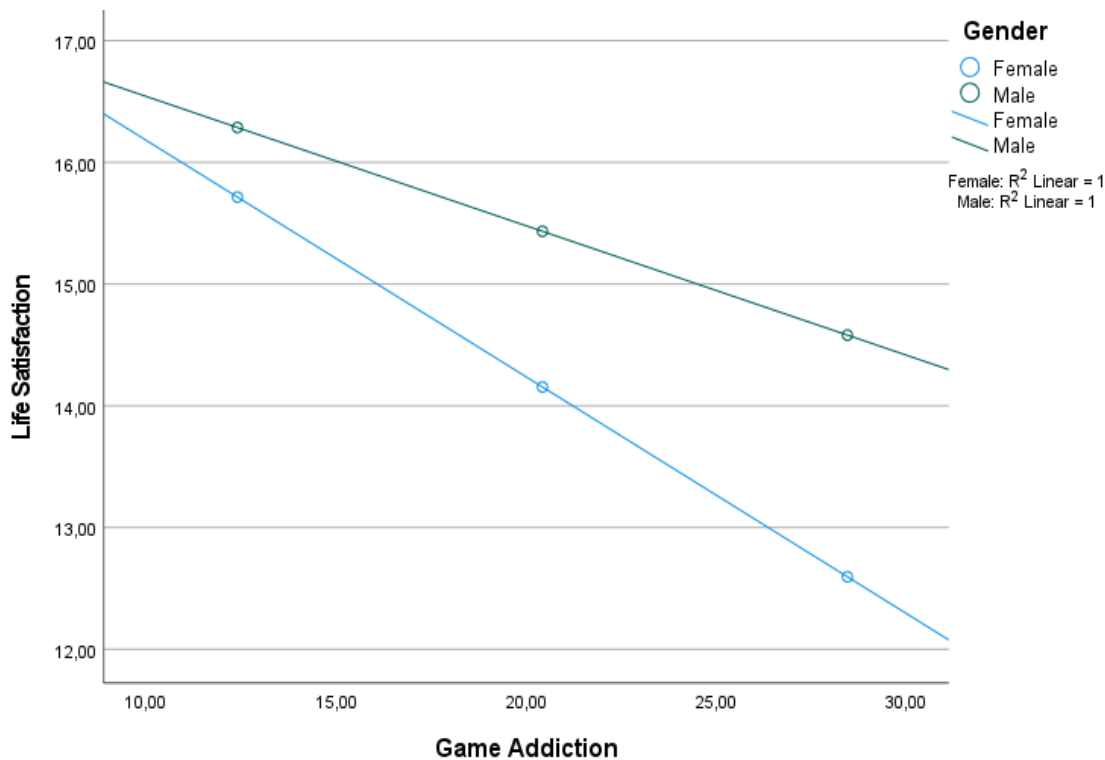


Figure 5. Gender moderated the relation between digital game addiction and life satisfaction.

5. Discussion

This study examined the relationship between psychological mechanisms affecting adolescents' life satisfaction, namely digital game addiction and difficulty in emotional regulation, and investigated the moderating role of gender. The findings revealed that difficulty in emotional regulation mediates the relationship between gaming addiction and life satisfaction in adolescents. However, this mediating effect was found to be fully mediating in males, while only partially mediating in females. The study results were evaluated in light of the relevant literature.

5.1. The Relationship Between Digital Game Addiction and Life Satisfaction

The current study confirms that digital game addiction is one of the psychological mechanisms that negatively predict adolescent life satisfaction, as many previous studies have done. In other words, as digital game addiction increases among adolescents, life satisfaction decreases (Ho & Kao, 2021; Makas & Koç, 2025; Phan et al., 2020). When examining the background of the effect of digital game addiction on life satisfaction, it has been observed that adolescents who play excessive games experience a decline in social skills over time, an increase in loneliness levels, and consequently a decrease in life satisfaction (Luo et al., 2022). The negative impact of digital game addiction on physical health, such as sleep quality and eating habits, is another factor affecting life satisfaction (Che Mokhtar & McGee, 2025; Zaman et al., 2022). Teenagers addicted to digital games spend most of their time playing games, which leads to a decrease in their motivation to study and academic achievement, as well as a decline in life satisfaction (Taş, 2017). Additionally, excessive engagement with games negatively impacts life satisfaction by disrupting family relationships (Deniz et al., 2024). Another factor that reduces life satisfaction in adolescents is that adolescents addicted to digital games experience intense mental health issues such as depression, stress, and anxiety (Loton et al., 2016). In summary, digital game addiction negatively affects social relationships, physical and mental health, and academic achievement, thereby reducing life satisfaction in adolescents. Additionally, studies have shown that low life satisfaction is associated with high game addiction (Filipovič et al., 2023; Okur & Özokes, 2020). This suggests that adolescents with low life satisfaction may turn to gaming as a coping mechanism, which can eventually lead to a vicious cycle.

5.2. *The Mediating Role of Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Between Game Addiction and Life Satisfaction*

When examining the relationship between digital game addiction, the first pathway of the mediation model, and difficulties in emotion regulation, it was found that digital game addiction increases emotion regulation difficulties in adolescents. This finding is consistent with the relevant literature (Estupiñá et al., 2024; Hollett & Harris, 2020; Lin et al., 2020). Adolescents may turn to digital games to avoid facing negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, stress, and loneliness (Satapathy et al., 2024). After a while, excessive gaming makes it difficult to cope with emotions in a healthy way and weakens emotion regulation skills (Schettler et al., 2024). Excessive engagement with digital games causes sleep problems, academic difficulties, and poor time management in daily life (Hawi et al., 2018; Molaeipour et al., 2025). This situation can trigger emotional imbalances and make emotional regulation more difficult.

The second pathway of the mediation model in the current study revealed that difficulties in emotion regulation negatively affect life satisfaction. In other words, as the level of difficulties in emotion regulation increases in adolescents, life satisfaction decreases. Adolescence is a complex period involving numerous developmental tasks, and emotional fluctuations and changes are particularly common during this time (Akeren et al., 2025; Miniksar & Kılıç, 2023). Adolescents with weak emotion regulation skills experience a decline in life satisfaction during this critical period due to difficulties in coping with developmental tasks and feeling overwhelmed during emotional fluctuations (Fernández & Gorriz, 2025; Nie et al., 2025). In addition, adolescents who struggle with healthy coping with emotions are reported to be prone to substance abuse, such as smoking and alcohol (Zohreh & Ghazal, 2018). Adolescents with difficulties in emotion regulation experience loneliness because they struggle with social skills such as developing close friendships and expressing themselves in social settings (Liu et al., 2023). A similar effect to that seen in negative social relationships is also observed in the academic sphere. Adolescents with weak emotion regulation skills lack the ability to sustain and develop academic motivation. Lack of concentration also reduces their academic performance (Usán Supervía & Quílez Robres, 2021). In addition, adolescents who have difficulty regulating their emotions are prone to many psychological problems such as anxiety and depression (Chen et al., 2025; Zhou & Zhen, 2022). In conclusion, difficulties in emotion regulation in adolescents can be said to reduce life satisfaction due to reasons such as loneliness, psychological problems, academic failure, risk of substance abuse, and weak impulse control.

When these findings are evaluated together with the mediating effect in the current study, digital game addiction may directly reduce life satisfaction, as well as indirectly reduce life satisfaction by causing difficulties in emotion regulation. Another finding from the mediation analysis suggests that difficulties in emotion regulation have a greater impact on adolescent life satisfaction than digital game addiction. Compared to digital game addiction, difficulties in emotion regulation negatively affect adolescents' lives in a broader context and reduce their life satisfaction.

5.3. *The Moderating Role of Gender*

As the outcome of the current study, the moderating effect of difficulties in emotion regulation on the relationship between gender and life satisfaction in adolescents with digital game addiction was examined. The results indicated that difficulties in emotion regulation play a full mediating role in male adolescents, while a partial mediating effect was observed in female adolescents. In other words, difficulties in emotion regulation eliminate the effect of digital game addiction on life satisfaction in males, whereas the direct effect of digital game addiction on life satisfaction persists, albeit weakly, in females. Considering that girls have higher emotional intelligence and emotional awareness than boys (Zysberg & Raz, 2019), it can be said that the effect of game addiction on difficulties in emotion regulation is weaker in girls than in boys. While boys exhibit more eager and passionate player profiles in digital games, girls exhibit more avoidant and reluctant player profiles (Castro & Neto, 2025). Based on this, it can be expected that boys' levels of difficulties in emotion regulation in the effect of digital game addiction will be higher than girls'. The change in the

mediating effect can also be explained by the gender differences in emotion expression patterns. While girls are known to express their emotions more freely and talk more about their feelings, boys are reported to suppress their emotions and adopt a more introverted attitude toward expressing emotions (Cummings et al., 2022). For this reason, difficulties in emotion regulation are more pronounced in males than in females. In summary, difficulties in emotion regulation have had a much stronger impact on life satisfaction in males than in females.

5.4. Contribution and Limitations

The study results have introduced new perspectives on intervention and prevention activities aimed at reducing the risk of low life satisfaction in adolescence. First, it has revealed that digital game addiction negatively predicts life satisfaction in adolescents. Therefore, to reduce the risk of low life satisfaction, awareness and intervention methods targeting digital game addiction should be adopted in school psychological counseling services that are easily accessible to adolescents. Second, it was observed that difficulties in emotion regulation negatively predict life satisfaction in adolescents. As an effective effort to reduce the risk of low life satisfaction in adolescents, priority should be given to awareness activities that develop emotion regulation skills. The third and perhaps most important contribution of this study is that it emphasizes the need to consider gender differences in all prevention and intervention activities aimed at reducing the risk of low life satisfaction. In particular, it is important not to overlook the need to support male adolescents in recognizing, expressing, and becoming more aware of their emotions.

As with any study, this study has certain limitations. First, since the data were collected at a single point in time, i.e., this is not a longitudinal study, it is not possible to establish a complete causal relationship between the variables in the current study. Future studies would benefit from testing the existing relationships using longitudinal designs and experimental models. Second, the study data were collected from adolescents through self-reporting. Since this situation carries the risk of respondent bias, it is recommended that future studies collect data from multiple sources, such as parents, teachers, or peers, to increase the validity of the findings. Third, this study sample is limited to students from different types of high schools in a specific city in Turkey. Therefore, a broader student sample from different age groups and cultures is required for future studies.

5.5. Conclusions

This study examined the mediating effect of emotion regulation difficulties and the moderating role of gender in the relationship between digital game addiction and life satisfaction among adolescents. The findings revealed that emotion regulation difficulties fully mediated the relationship between digital game addiction and life satisfaction among males. On the other hand, emotion regulation difficulties in females partially mediated the relationship between digital game addiction and life satisfaction. These results reveal that emotion regulation difficulties are a decisive psychological mechanism in the effect of digital game addiction on life satisfaction in adolescents and that this relationship varies according to gender. The findings indicate the importance of addressing emotion regulation difficulties in interventions targeting life satisfaction, especially in boys, while suggesting that other psychosocial factors should also be included in the process for girls. Future studies are recommended to include different psychosocial variables (social support, empathy, etc.) in addition to the model and to plan longitudinal designs. Furthermore, gender sensitivity should not be overlooked when developing preventive and developmental strategies for mental health services aimed at life satisfaction.

Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed substantially to the work reported in this manuscript. Specifically, they were involved in: (a) the conception and design of the study, as well as the analysis and interpretation of the data; (b) drafting the manuscript and/or revising it critically for significant intellectual content; and (c) approving the final version of the manuscript to be submitted for publication.

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Data Availability: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to the inclusion of raw materials used exclusively for the analyses conducted in this research.

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