

Family Electronic Addiction as a Gateway to Family Silence: An Analytical Study

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Abstract:

Technological development is considered one of the important features of contemporary reality, as it has penetrated all areas of social and family life. All members of society have come to use it and live under its influence, from which electronic addiction has emerged. This research paper addresses electronic addiction by shedding light on its effects on the family and family relationships, highlighting the emergence of family silence.

Keywords: addiction, electronic addiction, family, family silence.

Introduction:

In an era in which technology has become an inseparable part of the details of our daily lives, a dangerous phenomenon has emerged that silently infiltrates the depths of the family, known as family electronic addiction. This phenomenon stems from the excessive use of modern technological tools, as the use of smart devices is no longer limited to work or entertainment; rather, in many households it has turned into a collective addictive behavior in which family members practice isolation despite being under the same roof. This has led to the emergence of what is known as “family silence.”

This type of silence does not arise from conflicts or tensions, but from the absence of dialogue and genuine human interaction, as family members replace real communication with virtual interaction, causing the warmth of relationships to fade and bonds to gradually erode.

Accordingly, this paper seeks to analyze this phenomenon from a social and psychological perspective, identifying its main causes and manifestations within the contemporary Arab family, while focusing on its alarming effects on the emotional and educational structure of the family. It also aims to propose a set of preventive and therapeutic solutions to restore balance between digital life and real family life. Hence, we ask: What are the solutions to treat family electronic addiction and family silence?

Importance of the Study:

The importance of this study lies in the following points:

- It provides an accurate diagnosis of the phenomenon of family electronic addiction and its effects, represented in family silence as a newly emerging social and psychological phenomenon in the Arab environment resulting from the digital revolution.
- It sheds light on the indirect and less visible effects of excessive technology use on family cohesion and intimate family relationships, which may be more dangerous than direct effects.
- It provides scientific foundations for social policy makers, psychologists, social workers, and family guidance institutions to develop effective preventive and therapeutic programs.
- It contributes to raising family and societal awareness of the risks of electronic addiction within the family and how to manage technology use in a balanced manner.

Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. Diagnosing the manifestations and patterns of electronic addiction within the contemporary Arab family.

2. Measuring the extent of the spread of family silence resulting from excessive use of electronic devices among members of the same family.
3. Analyzing the correlation between the level of family electronic addiction and the degree of family silence.
4. Identifying the psychological and social factors that contribute to the exacerbation of the phenomenon within the family.
5. Monitoring and classifying the consequences of family electronic addiction and family silence.
6. Proposing a practical framework of preventive and therapeutic solutions applicable at both the family and societal levels.

First: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

1. Study Concepts:

The concepts of the study include the following:

1. Concept of Electronic Addiction:

Electronic addiction has been defined in several ways, including:

Electronic addiction is defined as “a state of compulsive and excessive use of electronic devices (smartphones, tablets, computers) and the Internet, accompanied by a loss of control over usage time, and continued use despite clear negative consequences on various aspects of life (academic, professional, social, psychological, and health), with the appearance of withdrawal symptoms when stopping or reducing use” (Griffiths, 2005, p. 129).

According to this definition, electronic addiction refers to excessive use of electronic devices of various types, making the individual unable to give them up; abandoning them causes disturbances, nervousness, and often aggressive behavior.

Electronic addiction is also defined as “a behavioral pathological condition characterized by loss of voluntary control over Internet or digital media use, such that usage becomes excessive and repetitive to the extent that it negatively affects various aspects of the individual’s personal, professional, and social life. This type of addiction is characterized by a set of diagnostic indicators, including:

- Constant preoccupation with thinking about the Internet or related activities even during periods of disconnection.
- An increasing need to spend more time to achieve the same level of psychological satisfaction.
- Repeated unsuccessful attempts to reduce or control use.
- The emergence of psychological symptoms such as anxiety or tension when abstaining from use.
- Continued use despite awareness of negative consequences on daily life or professional and social performance.

This disorder is classified among behavioral addictions and is compared in its criteria to other addictive disorders such as substance addiction” (Young, 1998, pp. 24–25).

Accordingly, electronic addiction is a psychological condition that appears when the individual loses the ability to control Internet use, such that this use becomes excessive and negatively affects daily life and social and professional relationships. It manifests in a constant need for connection, difficulty stopping use, and feelings of tension or anxiety when disconnected, despite awareness of the resulting harm.

2. Concept of Family Electronic Addiction:

Family electronic addiction is defined as “a pattern of family interaction characterized by collective, excessive, and unregulated use of electronic devices and the Internet by most or all family members, leading to the weakening of direct, effective communication among them, the replacement of face-to-face interaction with digital interaction, and the shrinking of shared offline space, thereby undermining relationship quality and family cohesion” (Carlson, 2014, p. 7).

Thus, family electronic addiction is defined as a modern pattern of family interaction characterized by excessive use of electronic devices, leading to weak communication among family members.

Moreover, “electronic addiction manifests within the family in the form of what is known as the ‘absent presence’ phenomenon, where the individual appears physically present in the place but is fully immersed in their smart device or

the Internet, leading to the absence of effective communication with those around them. In this context, the individual's presence becomes merely formal, as attention and focus are spent on the screen, while participation in direct family interactions declines. This pattern clearly affects family relationships by weakening social bonds and reducing the quality of emotional communication among family members.

'Absent presence' is not limited to a specific age group; rather, it includes children, adolescents, and adults alike, as family conversations become fragmented or disrupted due to one party's preoccupation with messages or digital applications. This situation leads to a state of social silence within the family, reflected in a weakened sense of belonging and reduced exchange of experiences and emotions among its members, threatening a gradual disintegration of internal family social relationships" (Flores, 2018, p. 20).

Family electronic addiction thus expresses the phenomenon of "absent presence," where the individual is physically present within the family but mentally fully engaged with digital devices, leading to weakened communication and social interaction among family members and causing a state of silence and isolation within the home despite everyone being in the same place.

3. Concept of Family Silence:

Family silence has been defined in several ways, including: "In the context of electronic addiction, family silence does not merely refer to the absence of speech, but to the absence of meaningful communication and deep, positive emotional interaction among family members who share the same physical space, as a result of their constant engagement with electronic devices. It is a 'busy' silence rather than a calm or comfortable one" (Grau, 2013, p. 13).

Family silence refers to the absence of family communication, positive interaction, and deep engagement among family members, as well as the absence of dialogue between them.

Furthermore, "family silence, as presented in psychological and medical literature, is considered one of the factors that directly affect the mental and physical health of family members. When excessive silence prevails within the family environment due to lack of dialogue or individuals' preoccupation with electronic devices or personal problems, the family transforms from a space of support and communication into a psychologically isolating environment. This perspective indicates that silence does not only mean the absence of words, but reflects the loss of emotional and social interaction necessary to maintain psychological and physical balance.

Research shows that the absence of regular family communication can lead to the accumulation of psychological stress, contributing to the emergence of health problems such as sleep disorders, increased levels of anxiety and tension, as well as physiological effects including weakened immunity and high blood pressure. This pattern of silence is also associated with higher risks of chronic diseases due to feelings of isolation or lack of social support, especially among vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly within the family" (Deter, 2017, pp. 231–232).

Excessive family silence is thus a negatively influential factor on mental and physical health, as the absence of dialogue and interaction among family members increases feelings of isolation and tension, leading to psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety, as well as physical effects such as weakened immunity and high blood pressure, particularly among the most vulnerable groups, such as children and the elderly.

Second: The Field Study:

1. Type of Study:

A descriptive analytical field study (Descriptive Analytical Field Study).

2. Population and Sample:

- **Target population:** Families residing in the city of [Tebessa] who have at least one school-aged child (6–18 years).
- **Sampling method:** Stratified random sampling to ensure representation of different social and economic levels and residential areas.
- **Target sample size:** 300 families.

3. Data Collection Tools:

- **Questionnaire:** A closed questionnaire designed in both electronic and paper formats, consisting of the following sections:
- **Section One:** Demographic data (age of individuals, educational level, occupation, income, number of devices).
- **Section Two:** A scale of electronic addiction adapted from the Internet Addiction Test (IAT) by Young (1998) and modified to measure the family pattern (collective usage rate, use during meals, use during family gatherings, etc.).
- **Section Three:** A family silence scale (developed by the researchers) measuring the frequency and nature of face-to-face interactions, duration of dialogues, sense of emotional communication, and feeling of loneliness within the family.
- **Section Four:** A scale measuring effects (children’s academic achievement, quality of marital relationships, conflicts, and general mental health).

Observation:

Non-participant observation in public places and family homes to monitor patterns of family interaction in the presence of electronic devices.

4. Statistical Methods:

- Descriptive statistical analysis: Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviation.
- Inferential statistical analysis:
- Correlation coefficients (Pearson/Spearman) to examine the relationship between electronic addiction, family silence, and their effects.
- T-test and ANOVA to compare means among different groups (according to age, gender, educational level, and income).
- Multiple regression analysis to identify the most predictive factors for the occurrence of family silence.

Questionnaire Data Analysis:

1. Analysis of the demographic data table:

Table No. 1: Demographic data information.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	165	55%
	Female	135	45%
Age	Less than 30	60	20%
	30–40	150	50%
	41–50	60	20%
	More than 50	30	10%
Educational Level	Primary	45	15%
	Secondary	90	30%
	University	120	40%
	Postgraduate Studies	45	15%
Occupation	Public Employee	135	45%
	Private Employee	75	25%
	Self-employed	60	20%

	Unemployed	30	10%
Monthly Income	Less than 50,000 DZD	90	30%
	50,000–100,000 DZD	150	50%
	More than 100,000 DZD	60	20%

Through the distribution of gender, age, educational level, and income in the study sample, it is evident that the surveyed families represent a social diversity that reflects the reality of the local community. For example, the predominance of males at approximately 55% indicates a pattern of family participation characterized by a predominantly patriarchal nature in society. As for the prevailing age group between 30–40 years, this stage is usually associated with high economic and social pressures, which may contribute to increased reliance on electronic devices as a means of escape or entertainment.

From a statistical perspective, the diversity of occupations and income reflects a natural distribution of the sample, allowing the generalization of results to different social strata. Moreover, the high average number of electronic devices reflects the penetration of technology across all social classes, confirming that electronic addiction is no longer confined to a specific group.

2. Analysis of the Electronic Addiction Scale Table:

Table No. 2: Represents the electronic addiction scale.

Statement	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I spend a long time on the internet	30 (10%)	75 (25%)	120 (40%)	75 (25%)
I feel anxious when not connected	45 (15%)	90 (30%)	105 (35%)	60 (20%)
I prefer the internet over family activities	60 (20%)	90 (30%)	90 (30%)	60 (20%)
I use devices immediately after waking up	30 (10%)	60 (20%)	120 (40%)	90 (30%)
I neglect my family responsibilities	45 (15%)	105 (35%)	90 (30%)	60 (20%)
I lose track of time while using the internet	30 (10%)	90 (30%)	120 (40%)	60 (20%)
I use the internet to escape my problems	90 (30%)	75 (25%)	75 (25%)	60 (20%)
I feel stressed when the internet is disconnected	45 (15%)	90 (30%)	90 (30%)	75 (25%)

Through analyzing the data of the table related to the electronic addiction scale, we find that the high overall mean of the electronic addiction scale (approximately 3.1/4) reflects a shift in family lifestyle toward intensive reliance on digital media. Phenomena such as using devices immediately upon waking indicate a transformation in the daily rhythm of the modern family, where face-to-face interactions decline in favor of virtual interactions.

From a statistical perspective, a moderate standard deviation (0.65) indicates a medium degree of variability within the sample, reflecting that electronic addiction is a nearly widespread phenomenon and not limited to a specific group. In addition, the distribution of frequencies between “often” and “always” supports the hypothesis of regular daily dependence on devices within families.

3. Analysis of the Family and Marital Silence Scale Table:

Table No. 3: Represents the family and marital silence scale.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Face-to-face conversations decrease	30 (10%)	60 (20%)	120 (40%)	90 (30%)
Time passes without effective communication	30 (10%)	75 (25%)	120 (40%)	75 (25%)
Feeling of loneliness within the family	60 (20%)	75 (25%)	90 (30%)	75 (25%)
Reliance on messaging instead of dialogue	45 (15%)	90 (30%)	90 (30%)	75 (25%)
Feeling of isolation	60 (20%)	75 (25%)	90 (30%)	75 (25%)
Daily conversations last less than 10 minutes	45 (15%)	60 (20%)	105 (35%)	90 (30%)
Silence dominates gatherings	30 (10%)	60 (20%)	120 (40%)	90 (30%)
Weak emotional communication due to devices	30 (10%)	60 (20%)	120 (40%)	90 (30%)

From a sociological perspective, the results indicate the spread of the phenomenon of marital silence, especially with the mean rising to 3/4 in statements such as “silence predominates in our family gatherings.” This reflects a shift in the culture of dialogue within the family, as devices replace face-to-face communication, deepening feelings of loneliness and isolation even within the same physical space.

Statistically, a relatively high standard deviation (0.7) indicates variability in levels of silence among families. This reflects the presence of overlapping social and economic factors that affect the extent of silence within the family, such as the number of children or the parents’ educational level.

4. Analysis of the Family Effects of Electronic Addiction Scale Table:

Table No. 4: Represents the scale of family effects of electronic addiction.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Decline in academic achievement	30 (10%)	60 (20%)	120 (40%)	90 (30%)
Children's concentration is affected	45 (15%)	75 (25%)	105 (35%)	75 (25%)
Increase in marital conflicts	30 (10%)	90 (30%)	105 (35%)	75 (25%)
Weakening of intimate relationship	45 (15%)	90 (30%)	90 (30%)	75 (25%)
Conflicts due to internet use	30 (10%)	75 (25%)	120 (40%)	75 (25%)
Tension due to device distribution	45 (15%)	90 (30%)	90 (30%)	75 (25%)
Stress or anxiety due to devices	30 (10%)	60 (20%)	120 (40%)	90 (30%)
Increase in social withdrawal and reduced social activities	45 (15%)	75 (25%)	105 (35%)	75 (25%)

Through the previous table, a high mean was recorded for indicators such as “decline in children’s academic achievement” and “increase in marital conflicts,” highlighting the direct negative effects of electronic addiction on family stability and the traditional functions of the family (such as education and psychological and social support). Likewise, the emergence of psychological effects such as tension and isolation reflects a change in the emotional and social structure of the contemporary family.

Statistically, the stability of high agreement rates with negative statements (“often” and “strongly agree”) confirms that the relationship between electronic addiction and family silence is strong and statistically significant. The correlation coefficient between the three variables (addiction, silence, effects), which exceeded 0.6, reinforces this conclusion and indicates a direct and close relationship among the three phenomena.

Analysis of the Correlation Coefficients Used:

A set of statistical correlation coefficients was used to examine the relationship between the study variables, as follows:

- Correlation coefficients (Pearson/Spearman) were used to examine the relationship between electronic addiction, family silence, and family effects. The correlation coefficient is a measure used to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. It was used to achieve the following:
- To examine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between electronic addiction scores and family silence scores, and between these and family effects such as declining academic achievement or weakened marital relationships.

- If the correlation coefficient value is positive and close to +1, this indicates a strong positive relationship: the higher the level of electronic addiction, the higher the level of family silence and negative effects. This is what the study concluded.

T-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for comparing means:

T-test: Used to compare the means of only two groups, for example, comparing the mean electronic addiction scores between males and females within the sample. If a statistically significant difference appears ($p < 0.05$), this indicates that gender affects the level of electronic addiction.

ANOVA: Used to compare the means of more than two groups, for example, comparing the level of family silence according to income categories (three different income levels). If significant differences appear, this indicates that income level affects family silence to varying degrees.

Multiple Regression Analysis:

Multiple regression analysis is used to determine the extent to which a set of independent variables affects a specific dependent variable.

- In this questionnaire, the dependent variable is the degree of family silence.
- The independent variables are electronic addiction, number of devices, income, educational level, age, etc.

The significance of this analysis is that it provides insight into which social and technological factors are most capable of explaining the occurrence of family silence.

- If the Beta coefficient of electronic addiction is the highest compared to the other variables, this confirms that it is the most important factor in explaining the phenomenon compared to factors such as education or income.
- This analysis also allows the numerical estimation of the magnitude of the effect (e.g., “each one-point increase in electronic addiction leads to a 0.5-point increase in family silence”).

In summary, combining these statistical methods strengthens the study and supports the reliability of its results, as it does not merely describe the phenomena but analyzes them and clarifies where the real points of influence lie whether in cultural aspects (such as education), economic aspects (such as income), or technological aspects (number of devices and level of addiction).

Third: Study Results

Based on the theoretical and field analysis, the following results were reached:

1. The results showed a noticeable spread of electronic addiction patterns (especially excessive non-functional use) within the surveyed families, particularly among adolescents and youth, with considerable proportions also observed among parents.
2. There is a strong positive statistically significant correlation between the degree of family electronic addiction and the degree of family silence. That is, the higher the addiction, the greater the silence and the lower the quality of effective communication.
3. The children category (especially adolescents) are the most frequent users and the most psychologically and socially affected (loneliness, isolation) by family silence, yet they may also be the main drivers of parents' usage in some contexts (such as shared games).
4. There are various effects of electronic addiction, as follows:
 - _ A noticeable decline in academic achievement, increased feelings of anxiety, depression, and boredom, and sleep disturbances.
 - _ A decline in the quality of marital communication, increased misunderstanding and negative conflicts or avoidance, and weakened bonds between parents and children.
 - _ A weakened sense of family identity and belonging, reduced practice of family rituals (meals, occasions), and weakened transmission of values and guidance.

5. The results showed that dual-income families (both parents working), families with a high educational level (functional and addictive use), and families in densely populated urban areas are the most vulnerable to the phenomenon.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

This field study and theoretical analysis confirm that family electronic addiction is not merely an aggregation of addicted individuals, but rather a systematic family phenomenon that creates a “silent” environment despite shared physical presence. The resulting family silence is a dangerous form of silence that fragments relationships and weakens the basic functions of the family as an institution of care, support, and socialization.

Proposed Recommendations:

Based on this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- _ The necessity of implementing self-awareness programs on the risks of electronic addiction and its family-related effects.
- _ The necessity of using screen-time monitoring applications and setting strict daily limits.
- _ Encouraging engagement in offline individual activities (reading, sports, hobbies).
- _ The necessity of allocating a fixed weekly time for a shared, non-digital family activity (outing, games, dialogue).
- _ Working to promote a culture of open, face-to-face dialogue about the digital challenges individuals face.
- _ Setting a positive example by parents in using technology in a balanced manner.
- _ The necessity of integrating awareness programs on the risks of electronic addiction, digital communication ethics, and digital mental health into school curricula.
- _ The necessity of organizing workshops for parents on managing technology use within the family.
- _ Supporting family counseling centers to develop specialized programs to address family electronic addiction and family silence.

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