

DICA Study - Internet and Food Addiction among Portuguese Teenagers

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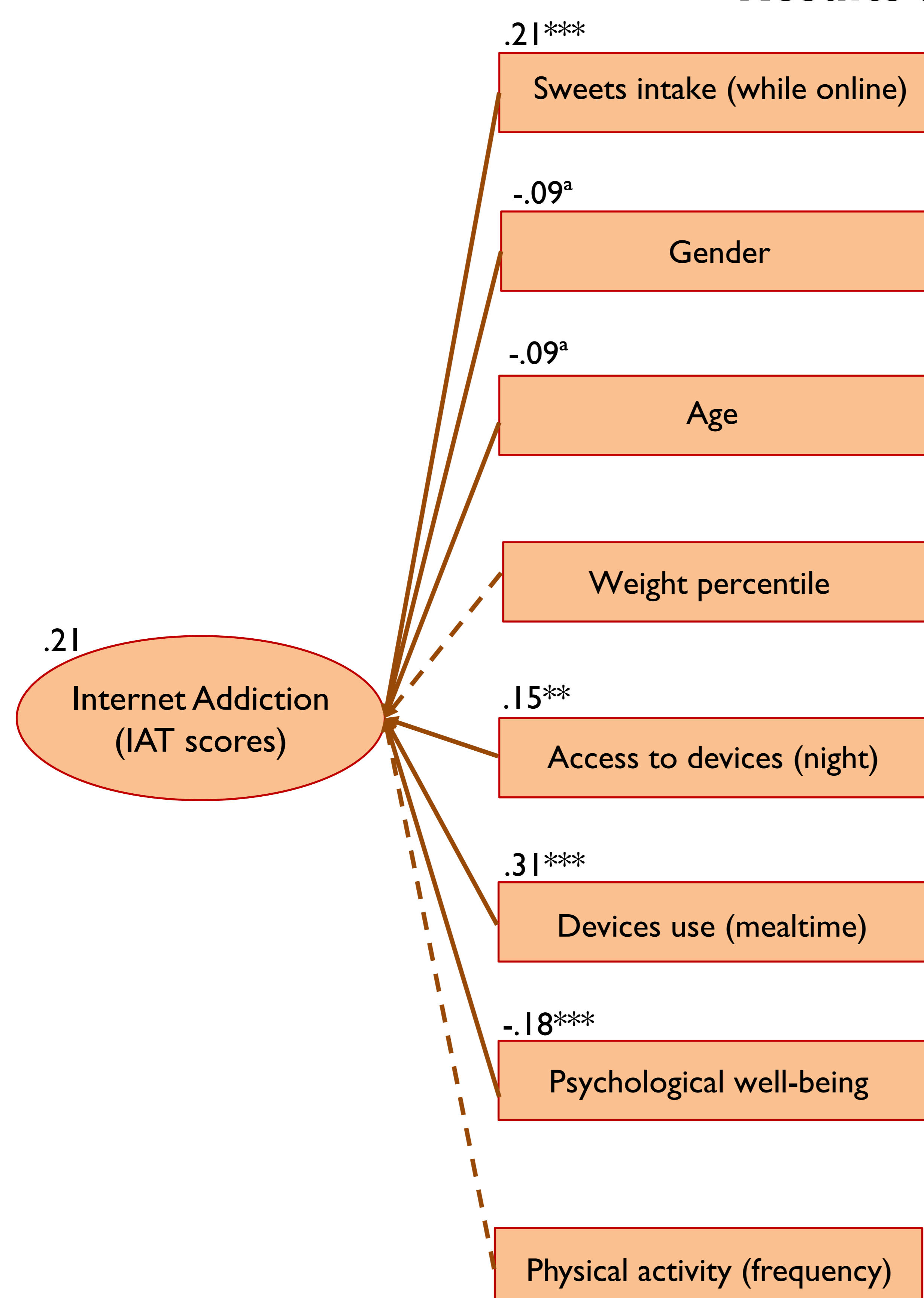
Introduction

There has been a significant increase of internet users in recent years, in Portugal. From 2002 (10,013) to 2017 (76,963) there was a huge increase in computers with internet, in schools, available to students around 12-15 years old¹. Despite the benefits, internet addiction has been observed in adolescents; a previous study with young Portuguese showed that around 16% of the sample presented this dependence². Therefore, internet addiction has been receiving increasing attention, since the overuse of the internet can negatively impact on both physical and psychological well-being (e.g., fewer hours of sleep, less healthy eating behaviour). Thus, the present study explores the association between food-related behaviour, weight, devices use, physical activity, perceived well-being and internet addiction in adolescents. These are the preliminary results of an ongoing study.

Method

The sampling is multi-phased, stratified, proportional to the number of schools by NUT III (nomenclature of territorial units for statistical purposes), systematic non-proportional in relation to the number of students from 7th to 12th grade (middle and high school). The study protocol, applied online, includes the Internet Addiction Test (IAT), the Smartphone Addiction Scale (SAS), and the Yale Food Addiction Scale (YFAS). At this point, 381 students aged 12 to 18 years old have participated.

Results and Conclusions



In this study, 86 adolescents (23.4%) presented behaviours congruent with moderate/severe internet addiction and most of them were boys ($n=56$). The mean age of this subgroup is 15 years old ($SD=1.65$).

The structural model showed an acceptable fit ($\chi^2/df=2.231$; $CFI=.839$; $TLI=.809$; $RMSEA=.057$ C.I. 90% [.051; .063], $p=.021$). Using devices during mealtime, perceiving a lower psychological well-being, having access to electronic devices (screens) at night, eating sweets while using the internet, being younger and being a boy predicted higher scores on IAT (Internet Addiction Test). This model explains 21.4% of the variance.

Additionally, 31 students were identified as having behaviours of food addiction (as assessed by the Yale Food Addiction Scale). These participants were compared with a randomized sample of 31 students with no food addiction (paired by gender): students with food addiction presented significantly higher scores in internet addiction ($t(60)=-2.164$; $p=.034$).

Thus, this study emphasises that two addictive behaviours seem to be associated in this preliminary analysis, with a sample of adolescents. Risk behaviours need to be early identified so that prevention initiatives can be implemented, to avoid the negative impact of these dysfunctional behaviours in physical and psychological health, academic performance and social well-being.

Figure. Structural Model having IAT score as the dependent variable
 *** $p<.001$; ** $p<.01$; ª $p<.10$

References

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- 2 - Pontes, H. O. M., Patrão, I. M., & Griffiths, M. D. (2014). Portuguese validation of the Internet Addiction Test: An empirical study. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, 3, 107-114. doi: 10.1556/JBA.3.2014.2.4

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