

# Determining the Predictive Contribution of Addiction Readiness Based on Identity Styles with the Mediation of Self-Differentiation and Social Problem-Solving in Prisoners of Isfahan Province

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### Article Info

#### Article type:

*Original Research*

#### Section:

*Clinical Psychology*

#### How to cite this article:

Kazemi Zahrani, H., & Ebrahimi Alavijeh, E. (2025). Determining the Predictive Contribution of Addiction Readiness Based on Identity Styles with the Mediation of Self-Differentiation and Social Problem-Solving in Prisoners of Isfahan Province. *KMAN Counseling and Psychology Nexus*, 3, 1-8.  
<http://doi.org/10.61838/kman.cp.psynexus.3.19>



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### ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to determine the predictive contribution of addiction readiness based on identity styles with the mediation of self-differentiation and social problem-solving. The statistical population of this study included all male prisoners in the central prison of Isfahan Province in 2019. From this population, 120 individuals were selected using the convenience sampling method. Four standardized questionnaires were used in this study: the Addiction Readiness Questionnaire, the Identity Style Questionnaire, the Self-Differentiation Scale, and the Social Problem-Solving Inventory. The results of hypothesis testing indicated a significant direct relationship between identity styles and addiction readiness. Furthermore, in the relationship between the informational identity orientation and addiction readiness, the variable of social problem-solving played a mediating role. However, in the relationship between other identity styles (normative identity style, diffuse-avoidant identity style, and commitment) and addiction readiness, the variables of self-differentiation and social problem-solving did not have a mediating role ( $p > .05$ ). Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that family education centers, prisons, and mass media raise individuals' awareness regarding the importance of achieving a successful identity. Additionally, at-risk individuals should be encouraged to actively process information, engage with identity-related issues, and participate in problem-solving activities. Training programs should also be implemented to enhance these factors.

**Keywords:** *addiction readiness, identity styles, self-differentiation, social problem-solving.*

## 1. Introduction

One of the most significant challenges that societies have faced throughout history is the issue of addiction, which continues to grow alongside modern advancements. Addiction is not only a personal issue but also a social dilemma that has devastating consequences, affecting individuals across all social classes and backgrounds (Albal & Buzlu, 2021; Fernández-Alarcón et al., 2024).

Currently, with population growth and the rapid spread of substances worldwide, no country is immune to the prevalence and expansion of addiction. Therefore, in recent years, considerable attention has been given to addiction prevention by identifying its contributing factors through scientific methods (Adindu et al., 2024).

From Butler's (2013) perspective, addiction develops through a nine-stage process, with the initial stage being addiction proneness or readiness. The World Health Organization defines addiction as a disorder in which individuals and society become dependent on continuous substance use. In this definition, addiction readiness refers to the potential or predisposition toward addiction. In other words, individuals with higher addiction readiness are at greater risk of developing an addiction. Clearly, identifying the factors that contribute to and accelerate this readiness takes precedence over treatment (Butler, 2013).

Among the key factors influencing addiction readiness is an individual's acquisition of various identity styles. Identity is a set of beliefs, values, behaviors, and skills that integrate into a coherent whole in adulthood, thereby enhancing self-confidence and responsibility in assigned tasks. A well-formed and healthy identity reduces the likelihood of impulsive behaviors in different situations and strengthens decision-making abilities and problem-solving skills. Conversely, improper identity development and repeated failures in life, along with difficulties in forming healthy relationships and decision-making, can result in confusion and uncertainty. Research has shown that a diffuse-avoidant identity style is associated with substance and alcohol use (Hosseini Almadani et al., 2011).

Bowen referred to identity confusion as self-differentiation. Self-differentiation represents emotional maturity, enabling individuals to rationally resolve emotional challenges without being overwhelmed. Highly differentiated individuals are aware of their emotions and can maintain their composure in deep relationships. In contrast, individuals with low self-differentiation either

remain emotionally fused with others or react with intense emotional detachment when faced with intimacy, leading to severe anxiety responses. Studies on self-differentiation and addiction readiness have indicated that high self-differentiation acts as a protective factor against addiction, while low self-differentiation increases vulnerability to addiction. A well-differentiated individual possesses a strong alignment with their true self, whereas a poorly differentiated individual is influenced by a false self (Ghaffari et al., 2010; Pirzadeh & Parsakia, 2023).

Studies conducted within criminal populations have found a correlation between impaired problem-solving abilities and substance use. Social problem-solving refers to engaging in tasks where solutions are not readily apparent and developing innovative strategies to address everyday challenges. Many researchers consider problem-solving to be one of the highest forms of thinking, as it allows individuals to generate and select the most effective solutions from available options (Ghamari Givi & Mojadad, 2016).

Several studies have investigated this subject. Haji Hassani and Hashemi (2019) found a significant negative correlation between intrinsic religious orientation, self-differentiation, and addiction readiness (Haji Hasani & Hashemi, 2019). Abedi Pour et al. (2018) concluded that identity styles, parenting styles, and coping strategies play crucial roles in predicting addiction readiness, suggesting that training adolescents and their parents in these skills could help prevent addiction (Abedi Pour et al., 2018). Rezaei and Shakerian (2018) reported that transcendental identity and diffuse-avoidant identity predict addiction tendencies, with a positive correlation between transcendental identity, committed identity, and addiction proneness (Rezaei & Shakerian, 2018). Salari Pak and Azizi (2018) indicated that higher levels of neuroticism among students are associated with increased addiction readiness, whereas higher levels of extraversion, flexibility, agreeableness, and conscientiousness reduce addiction readiness (Salari Pak & Azizi, 2018). Zilberman et al. (2018) found that individuals with substance use disorders closely resemble those with behavioral addictions (such as compulsive sexual behaviors) and that personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness, honesty, and religiosity significantly reduce addiction readiness (Zilberman et al., 2018).

Given the increasing trend in both traditional and synthetic drug use in recent years, alongside the limited knowledge of the factors leading to substance use initiation,

there is a pressing need for further research in this domain. Since the study population consists of prisoners, reports on drug discoveries within prisons suggest that substance use is prevalent in these environments. Prison is a distinct social setting influenced by the country's political, social, and economic structures while differing from institutions such as military barracks. Due to the deprivation of various social rights and the monotonous, repetitive nature of prison life, prisoners experience reduced natural stimuli, which contributes to the deterioration of their thought processes. In such conditions, individuals are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors. Research on addiction in prisons has reported addiction prevalence rates ranging from 20% to 80%, with many inmates experiencing their first substance use after incarceration (Jalilian et al., 2013).

In summary, this study aims to comprehensively assess the contribution of three key components—identity styles, self-differentiation, and social problem-solving—in predicting addiction readiness. Achieving this goal could play a significant role in reducing and preventing addiction. Accordingly, this study seeks to determine whether addiction readiness can be predicted based on identity styles, with the mediation of self-differentiation and social problem-solving, among prisoners in Isfahan Province.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study is a descriptive-correlational study utilizing structural equation modeling. The statistical population included all male prisoners in the central prison of Isfahan Province in 2019. From this population, 120 individuals were selected using the convenience sampling method.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Addiction Proneness

The Iranian Addiction Proneness Scale was developed by Zargar (2006) and is designed to assess addiction readiness based on psychosocial conditions. This questionnaire consists of two factors and includes 35 items, along with 5 lie detection items. The reliability and validity of this instrument have been confirmed by its developers and numerous researchers worldwide, including in Iran.

#### 2.2.2. Identity Style

This questionnaire was developed by Berzonsky in 1989 and consists of 40 items rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. It assesses three identity styles: informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant/social identity styles. The validity and reliability of this questionnaire have been confirmed in Iran and other countries (Tanhaye Reshvanloo et al., 2024).

#### 2.2.3. Self-Differentiation

This questionnaire was originally developed by Skowron and Friedlander in 1998 with 63 items. It was later revised by Skowron and Smith in 2003, and the final version was structured by Jackson with 46 items and four factors, based on Bowen's theory. This self-report instrument is designed to assess individuals' levels of self-differentiation, with a primary focus on adults, significant life relationships, and current relationships with their family of origin. The validity and reliability of this questionnaire have been examined and confirmed in multiple countries, including Iran (Abaie & Bagheri, 2024).

#### 2.2.4. Social Problem-Solving

This questionnaire was developed by D'Zurilla and Nezu in 1992 and consists of two main dimensions: problem formulation and problem-solving skills. It includes 25 items, scored on a five-point Likert scale. This instrument has been widely used in various studies, and its validity and reliability have been confirmed in Iran (Tajeryan et al., 2022).

### 2.3. Data Analysis

For data analysis, structural equation modeling was performed using SmartPLS 3 software.

## 3. Findings and Results

Before testing the research hypotheses, it was necessary to determine whether the data followed a normal distribution. To assess the normality assumption, the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was used. In the K-S test, if the significance level is greater than .05, the distribution of the variable is considered normal; otherwise, the distribution is non-normal. The results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) Test*

Variable	K-S Test	Significance Level
Active Readiness	0.06	0.200
Passive Readiness	0.13	0.001
Addiction Readiness (Total Score)	0.08	0.070
Problem Identification	0.08	0.062
Problem-Solving Skills	0.17	0.001
Social Problem-Solving (Total Score)	0.22	0.001
Emotional Reactivity	0.05	0.200
"I" Position	0.07	0.079
Emotional Cutoff	0.11	0.012
Fusion with Others	0.09	0.042
Self-Differentiation (Total Score)	0.08	0.064
Informational Orientation	0.12	0.010
Normative	0.09	0.049
Diffuse/Avoidant	0.08	0.047
Commitment	0.09	0.051

The results in Table 1 indicate that the K-S test significance level for some research variables, including passive readiness, problem-solving skills, social problem-solving (total score), emotional cutoff, fusion with others, and identity styles (informational orientation and normative), was less than .05. This suggests that the

distribution of these variables significantly deviates from a normal distribution.

Since one of the assumptions for analyzing causal relationships is the absence of multicollinearity among variables, the correlation coefficient matrix for the study variables is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Correlation Coefficient Matrix Among Research Variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Addiction Readiness	1						
2. Social Problem-Solving	-.32**	1					
3. Self-Differentiation	-.24**	0.13	1				
4. Informational Orientation	-.28**	.22**	0.16	1			
5. Normative	-.24**	.16*	-.05	.43**	1		
6. Diffuse/Avoidant	.21*	-.09	.21*	.17	0.14	1	
7. Commitment	-.24**	0.12	0.06	.46**	0.63**	.23**	1

\*\*p<0.05, \*p<0.01

The correlation coefficients among the variables indicate that all correlations were below .80, thereby rejecting the presence of multicollinearity among the variables.

In the present study, due to the non-normal distribution of some variables and the small sample size (120 participants),

structural equation modeling was used to confirm or reject the hypotheses, employing the SmartPLS 3 software, which applies the partial least squares (PLS) method. To clarify the results of the measurement model fit, the factor loadings for each research variable are reported the following tables.

**Table 3**

*Factor Loadings for Indicators of Addiction Readiness, Social Problem-Solving, and Self-Differentiation*

Variable	Indicators	Factor Loadings
Addiction Readiness	Active Readiness	0.90
	Passive Readiness	0.88
Social Problem-Solving	Problem Identification	0.47

Self-Differentiation	Problem-Solving Skills	0.94
	Emotional Reactivity	0.83
	"I" Position	0.20
	Emotional Cutoff	0.62
	Fusion with Others	0.34

As observed in Table 3, the indicators "I" Position and Fusion with Others under the variable Self-Differentiation had factor loadings below 0.40. Consequently, these

components were removed from the measurement model for this variable.

**Table 4**

*Factor Loadings for Indicators of Each Identity Style*

Variable	Indicators	Factor Loadings	Variable	Indicators	Factor Loadings
Informational Identity Style	2	0.48	Diffuse/Avoidant Identity Style	3	0.14
	5	0.40		8	0.44
	6	0.20		13	0.28
	16	-0.001		17	0.28
	17	0.58		24	0.42
	25	0.51		27	0.28
	26	0.30		29	0.75
	30	0.53		31	0.58
	33	0.49		36	0.04
	35	0.42		38	0.34
Normative Identity Style	37	0.44	Commitment Identity Style	1	0.18
	4	0.35		7	0.87
	10	0.40		9	0.61
	19	0.48		11	0.51
	21	0.52		12	-0.001
	23	0.67		14	0.64
	28	0.51		15	0.21
	32	0.54		20	0.04
	34	0.56		22	0.24
	40	0.30		39	0.41

As observed in Table 4, indicators 6, 16, and 26 from the Informational Identity Style, indicators 4 and 40 from the Normative Identity Style, indicators 3, 13, 17, 27, 36, and 38 from the Diffuse/Avoidant Identity Style, and indicators 1, 12, 15, 20, and 22 from the Commitment Identity Style had factor loadings below 0.40. Consequently, these components

were removed from the measurement models for these variables.

Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha indices were used to assess the reliability of the scales, with a threshold value of 0.70 for confirming reliability.

**Table 5**

*Reliability Indices for Research Variables*

Variable	Composite Reliability (CR)	Cronbach's Alpha
Addiction Readiness	0.89	0.75
Social Problem-Solving	0.70	0.75
Self-Differentiation	0.79	0.73
Informational Identity Style	0.78	0.82
Normative Identity Style	0.73	0.69
Diffuse/Avoidant Identity Style	0.81	0.79
Commitment Identity Style	0.77	0.87

Table 5 shows that all reliability indices exceed 0.70 (except for the Cronbach's Alpha of the Normative Identity

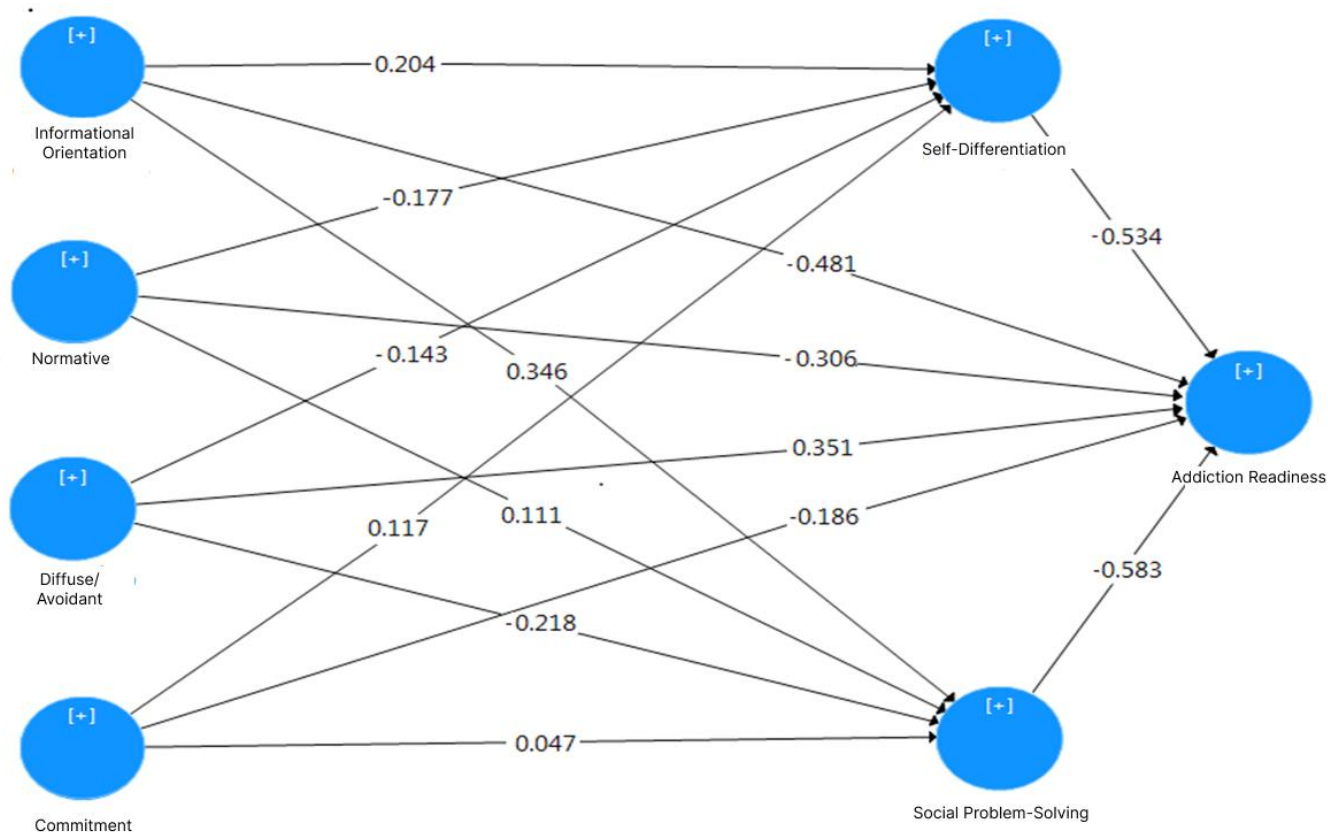
Style, which is close to 0.70), confirming the reliability of the measurement instruments. Overall, based on the reported

indices, it can be concluded that the research data exhibit a good fit with the factor structure and the theoretical

framework of the study, indicating alignment between the items and the theoretical constructs.

**Figure 1**

*Path Coefficients (Standardized Estimates) of the Modified Research Model*



To test the research hypotheses, path coefficients and significance values were analyzed. Figure 1 presents the path coefficients and their significance levels. In interpreting the

results, a t-statistic greater than 1.96 indicates significance at the 0.05 level, while a t-statistic greater than 2.58 indicates significance at the 0.01 level.

**Table 6**

*Results of the Significance Test for the Direct Path Coefficients Between Independent Variables and Addiction Readiness*

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Path Coefficient	Critical Ratio (t-value)	Significance
Addiction Readiness	Informational Identity Style	-0.48	4.02	0.001
	Normative Identity Style	-0.30	3.32	0.001
	Diffuse/Avoidant Identity Style	0.35	3.67	0.001
	Commitment Identity Style	-0.18	2.39	0.019
	Self-Differentiation	-0.53	3.05	0.001
	Social Problem-Solving	-0.58	3.12	0.001

According to the results, a significant relationship exists between addiction readiness and the identity styles of informational, normative, diffuse/avoidant, and commitment ( $p < .05$ ). Moreover, the path coefficient between self-differentiation and addiction readiness is -0.53, with a

critical ratio of 3.05, which is greater than 1.96. Thus, a significant relationship exists between self-differentiation and addiction readiness ( $p < .05$ ), indicating that self-differentiation predicts addiction readiness. Finally, the path coefficient between social problem-solving and addiction

readiness is -0.58, with a critical ratio of 3.12, which is greater than 1.96. Therefore, a significant relationship exists between social problem-solving and addiction readiness ( $p < .05$ ), confirming that social problem-solving predicts addiction readiness.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to determine the predictive contribution of addiction readiness based on identity styles, with the mediation of self-differentiation and social problem-solving. The first hypothesis, which proposed that identity styles predict addiction readiness, was confirmed. This finding aligns with the prior results (Abedi Pour et al., 2018; Rezaei & Shakerian, 2018). To explain this finding, it can be stated that individuals classified within the identity achievement or moratorium statuses, according to Marcia's (1996) identity status model, are more likely to adopt the informational identity style. Research has shown that the use of an informational identity style is positively correlated with problem-focused coping, conscious decision-making, active self-exploration, internal locus of control, a high need for cognition, cognitive complexity, and facilitative anxiety (Abedi Pour et al., 2018; Hosseini Almadani et al., 2011; Rezaei & Shakerian, 2018; Tanhaye Reshvanloo et al., 2024). These individuals seek less validation and approval from others, trust their own judgments, and make independent decisions. Moreover, they exhibit greater tolerance and acceptance in dealing with new and ambiguous situations compared to those with other identity styles. Since individuals with a high level of informational identity have navigated identity crises and committed to personal values, they are less vulnerable to addiction. Commitment to ideological, familial, and occupational values serves as a protective factor and is effective in preventing addiction tendencies.

Another finding, confirming that self-differentiation predicts addiction readiness, was also supported. This finding is consistent with prior research (Haji Hasani & Hashemi, 2019). To interpret this finding, it can be argued that highly differentiated individuals have a clear definition of themselves and their beliefs, can determine their own life direction, and maintain self-control in emotionally intense situations that often lead others to impulsive behaviors and poor decisions. These individuals rely on reason and logic in decision-making. In contrast, undifferentiated individuals, who lack a defined sense of identity, tend to be swept along by the emotional waves of their family during interpersonal

tensions, leading to heightened chronic anxiety. Consequently, they are more susceptible to psychological disorders and may turn to substance use as a means of reducing anxiety (Salari Pak & Azizi, 2018). Overall, there is a significant relationship between low differentiation and psychological disorders, physical illnesses, substance abuse, and social problems.

Another key finding was that social problem-solving predicts addiction readiness, which was confirmed. This result is in line with the prior findings (Ghaffari et al., 2010; Ghamari Givi & Mojadad, 2016; Salari Pak & Azizi, 2018).

One of the contributing factors to substance use is the lack of familiarity with life skills. Problem-solving skills training can play a significant role in reducing the positive attitudes of individuals with substance use disorders toward opioids and increasing the likelihood of successful treatment. Additionally, by altering their attitudes, patients' intrinsic motivation to quit substance use is strengthened, reducing external pressures from others, particularly family members, and alleviating the stress imposed on their families. Problem-solving skills training can be considered a cost-effective method for treating individuals with substance use disorders, preventing unnecessary financial burdens on families. This training is not only effective in reducing the attitudes of individuals toward substance use but also serves as a preventive strategy before individuals become ensnared by addiction. By acting as a protective shield, it helps individuals resist life adversities and unwarranted demands from others.

The first limitation of this study relates to its geographical scope, as it was conducted in the city of Isfahan. Therefore, caution should be exercised before generalizing the findings to other cities until the study is replicated elsewhere. The second limitation is the correlational nature of the research, which prevents causal inferences from the findings. Future studies are recommended to include broader age ranges in their analyses. Given the study's finding that social problem-solving predicts addiction readiness, training in this skill could be beneficial in prevention, treatment, relapse prevention, and changing the attitudes of individuals with substance use disorders toward drug use. Such training may also help many individuals cope with daily stressors, make sound decisions in the face of stressors, and effectively solve personal problems.

#### Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

## Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

## Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

## Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

## Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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