

Family communication experience among students who are addicted to online games



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ABSTRACT

Background: Someone who plays online games continuously will experience feelings of extreme pleasure and want to play the games repeatedly, resulting in online game addiction. The high prevalence of online game addiction causes poor relationships between children and parents since children are too busy playing online games. A considerable amount of time spent playing online games also causes university students to lack opportunities for social interactions. This study aims to explore family communication experiences among university students addicted to online games.

Methods: This study adopted a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, involving eight respondents. The data were collected using in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. The Indonesian Online Game Addiction Questionnaire was distributed to the participants to determine who fitted into the addiction criteria.

Result: This study resulted in five themes as follows: students' awareness of the importance of family communication; the intensity of communication between students and their parents; the changes in students' contact with family due to online game addiction; the impact of parenting style on students' online game addiction; and online game addiction as the cause of conflicts between students and their parents.

Conclusion: Parenting style contributes to online game addiction. Online game addiction among students causes changes, especially in the intensity and need for communication with parents despite students' good awareness of the importance of maintaining contact with their parents.

Keywords: Family communication, online game addiction, university students.

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INTRODUCTION

Technology advances provide better entertainment, one of which is online games.¹ Online game offer players exciting challenges and attract players to finish them. Online games usually involve interactions between gamers. The interactions can provoke changes in an individual's characteristics. One who plays online games continuously will experience feelings of extreme pleasure and want to play the games repeatedly, resulting in online game addiction that can disrupt one's own life.

One is addicted to online games when consciously or unconsciously immersed in online games. As a result, one cannot differentiate between real-life and virtual life.² Online game addiction is a condition where one is strongly attached to gaming habits and finds it difficult to detach oneself from online games. Thus, one becomes addicted and wants to play all the time.³

Online game addiction is influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include the desire to reach high scores, boredom, inability to prioritize activities, and lack of self-control. Meanwhile, external factors have a less-controlled environment where friends play online games and a lack of good social relationships with parents and peers.⁴

The prevalence of online game addiction in Indonesia is estimated to be 6.1%.⁵ This high prevalence of online game addiction causes poor relationships between children and parents. Children become too busy playing online games. The Digital 2020 reports: Global Digital Review found that in early 2020, 4.5 billion people were internet users. The majority (69%) of the internet users admitted that they played mobile games. However, 41% played games on laptops or desktops, and 25% played consoles. On average, people around the world play games 70 minutes a day. Meanwhile, people play games

83 minutes a day.⁶ Game addiction can lead to several problems, one of which is communication problems between adolescents and parents.

Poor relationships with parents can frustrate adolescents. Poor relationships due to lack of attention and communication can result in unfulfilled emotional needs. Adolescents then find ways to fulfill their emotional needs by using the internet because it can help them build interpersonal relationships with others. Thus, adolescents spend time and depend on the internet.⁷ Such things often happen among university students.

A university student is a student acquiring knowledge or pursuing higher education in a university.⁸ Most university students leave their parents' house and live in another city to study. Moreover, a student in their late teens has the freedom to choose activities they want to do daily. There are many underlying reasons for adolescents or students to sit in front of a

computer for a long time and prefer virtual life to real life. The considerable amount of time students spend playing online games causes students to have no time for social life.⁹

Communication between family and children is declining because they prefer to spend a long period playing online games. Communication between family members is vital to strengthen family relationships and prevent conflicts in the family. Therefore, the researcher was interested in studying communication between students addicted to online games and their families. This study aims to explore the communication experiences of students who are addicted to online games with their parents.

METHODS

A qualitative method with a phenomenological approach was adopted to explore the communication between students addicted to online games and their families. The research sample was the students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, recruited using the snowball sampling technique. Based on data saturation, the sample consisted of eight participants. This study was conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

The data were collected using in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation.¹⁰ The Indonesian Online Game Addiction Questionnaire was distributed to the participants to determine who fitted into the addiction criteria.¹⁰

Validity tests were also conducted as follows: 1) member check to support the credibility of the data, done by using triangulation method that required retrieving information through in-depth interviews; 2) peer debriefing or discussion with fellow researchers and supervisors about the data to minimize errors and to generalize data; and 3) bracketing to maintain the objectivity of the data, avoid the researcher's subjectivity, and focus on the research goals. The data were then analyzed using Giorgi's thematic analysis method (1985) to obtain the themes of the study.

RESULTS

This study resulted in five main themes as follows: students' awareness of the importance of family communication, the intensity of communication between students and their parents, the changes in students' contact with family due to online game addiction, the impacts of parenting style on students' online gaming behaviors, and the problems between students and their parents due to online game addiction.

Theme 1. Students' awareness of the importance of family communication

The majority of the participants were aware of the importance and benefits of family communication. It is proven by the participants' statements as follows.

"Yes, it's very important, if I don't communicate with my parents, we will never know how each other are doing. And also... we can tell stories, share problems, and others." (P2)

"I think it's very important to know or share the problems that we are facing or to talk about my future study or career." (P3)

"Important, without communication, our relationship with our parents will be unhealthy." (P4)

"Of course, there is; communication can bring the family closer, especially when I'm away like this. I should keep in touch with my parents so that we still feel close." (P2)

"For me, we can open up with each other and know what everyone thinks about a problem. For example, my mother asked me to cut vegetables, and I thought that my mother seemed to be very tired, so I had to help her. So, we can be more sensitive with each other." (P7)

Theme 2. The intensity of communication between students and family

The participants communicated or kept in touch with family every week for at least five minutes and an hour at most (60 minutes). It is shown by the participants' statements as follows.

"Maybe once in three days with my mother for an hour, but two weeks with my father for 10 minutes maximum." (P2)

"Once a week, I guess. About five to ten minutes on the phone." (P3)

"Two to three times a week I contact them. Call for about five minutes." (P5)

"About 10 minutes, sometimes less ... The longest is half an hour to an hour." (P1)

"Usually once in two or three days. At least half an hour or one hour." (P8)

Theme 3. The changes in communication between students and family due to online game addiction

Being addicted to online games changed students' contact with their parents. For examples:

"My relationship with my parents is normal, but I can say it's also good. My relationship with my family is good enough." (P2)

"My relationship with my parents ... I think is not too close." (P3)

"Our relationship is normal, I guess. I can say that it is good. I am also close with my family." (P4)

"I am quite close with my mother. I think because my father and I are both busy, so we're not close, and our communication is a bit poor." (P5)

"It's good, our communication is quite good, but not too often because my parents are busy too with their jobs, so we have to find the right time to chat, so no one is disturbed." (P6)

"We spend our time together by gathering in the family room and chatting when we have free time and when my father has a day off. And we usually have dinner together." (P2)

"Nothing. Everyone is busy." (P3)

"I guess I rarely tell stories to my parents." (P3)

The majority of the participants revealed that talking with mothers was different from talking with fathers. The following statements show this.

"I always talk to my mother when it comes to love or feelings for a girl." (P1)

"If it's about feelings, I often go to my mother." (P7)

"If I want to tell stories, I often go to my mother because she understands better than my father." (P8)

"If it's with my father, I usually ask how he is doing, but we chat a little because he's busy with work." (P2)

“No, maybe never, oh but I often talk with my father about business. When it comes to expenses, I go to my father. But, when it’s about personal problems, I go to my mother.” (P5)

“But with my father, I am often more straightforward when there is a problem.” (P6)

While suffering from online game addiction, the participants experienced changes in their communication with parents either directly or remotely. For instances:

“I tend to be cold when my parents want to chat with me, but I’m too focused on playing games. If they talk to me continuously, I will move.” (P1)

“I usually remove my headphones and then chat with them a little. As much as possible, I respond when my parents talk to me.” (P4)

“I respond while playing games. Sometimes I don’t speak clearly because I focus on my game and my attention is divided, so my response is not always clear.” (P5)

“I don’t answer the call because when I’m playing Mobile Legend, it cannot be paused.” (P1)

“I didn’t answer it that time. I just let it be, but for the second or third call, I was afraid, so I had to exit the game and answer my parents’ call.” (P2)

“Sometimes I answer it first, and then I tell them to wait because I’m still playing a game. I’ll say I will exit the game first and I will call back.” (P7)

“I think we used to talk a lot.” (P1)

Theme 4. The impacts of parenting style on students’ online gaming behaviors
The majority of participants had authoritarian parents, and a few had permissive parents. This can be seen from the participants’ statements.

“Both my parents have the same parenting style. They are more relaxed. There are rules, but not strict, and they let me do anything I want.” (P3)

“My parents are strict, but I just take it easy.” (P4)

“My mother is stricter, but my father is more relaxed.” (P6)

“... so, my parents are overprotective because I’m an only child. That’s how my parents are.” (P7)

Theme 5. Online game addiction is the cause of problems between students and parents.

Online game addiction was a source of conflict between students and parents.

“At that time, I was playing a game for a long time until my father was angry at me and even scolded my friend. Yes, my father was a bit emotional. He was upset, but he didn’t hit me.” (P2)

“In the past, sometimes my parents asked me to do something ... I used to be very addicted until I didn’t want to get out of my bedroom and forgot about real life. I had Wi-Fi and a laptop. And there were always conflicts and fights.” (P3)

“It was because I got bad grades. I played a lot and never studied, and my father was a teacher in my senior high school. My father’s colleagues told him that my grades were bad, haha.” (P5)

“It was about money because I’ve just realized that I have spent a lot of money only to play online games. If I sum up the money, I spent for online games from I was still in elementary school until now, I am shocked Hehe.” (P7)

“About telling stories, I often tell my mother about my problems, but not all of them. Sometimes I keep it to myself and try to find solutions on my own, but the person I often talk to about my problems is my mother.” (P2)

Students still needed their parents’ help with their problems.

“It depends. If I can solve the problems myself, I will not tell my parents. But, if I’ve tried hard and I’m stuck, I will tell my parents and ask them for suggestions and solutions.” (P6)

“So, I was given advice and then told to think by myself to find solutions. So, my parents don’t force me always to follow their advice to solve my problem. We solve our problems in our way, but parents still help by giving advice. The rest is up to us.” (P7)

“I usually get scolded first, and then my parents offer some solutions.” (P8)

DISCUSSION

1. Students’ awareness of the importance of family communication

The majority of the participants who either live in the same house with their parents or separately from them are aware

of the importance of communication with family.

Students who particularly move away from home for university can still keep in touch with their parents even though sometimes obstacles occur.¹² Despite being knowledgeable about the importance of communication with family, students often do not tell their family anything for fear of making them anxious and worried. Students do not want to weigh on their parents’ minds.

2. The Intensity of Communication between Students and Family

The intensity of students’ communication with their parents is average one hour at most and three minutes at least.¹² Due to living far away from their parents, students experience the decreasing intensity of face-to-face communication with their parent’s Good communication contributes to family health.¹³ Highly intense contact can help students become closer with, more open to and more comfortable to talk about anything with their parents.¹⁴ However, low intensity of communication can weaken the relationship between students and their parents. Mothers communicate more intensively with children than fathers do because fathers do not stay at home due to work to make ends meet.¹⁵

One addicted to playing games will increase the amount of time playing games but will spare a little time to do other things, especially communicating with one’s parents.¹⁶

3. The Changes in Communication between Students and Family due to Online Game Addiction

Male students go to mothers more frequently than to fathers when something happens. They tend to be closer to their mothers because they think that mothers are everything and irreplaceable.¹⁷ Students are more open and more intimate with mothers than with fathers.¹⁸ Male students communicate with fathers less often than female students do. This is evident by the conversations between male students and their fathers being

focused more on finance, goals, etc., while female students are more open to sharing their feelings with their fathers. Some students said that before being addicted to online games, they had more time to communicate with family, and some others stated that there were no changes in their communication with their parents. While addicted to online games, four students said they had less time to communicate with parents and became easily irritated.

The impact of online games on social behavior is the declining relationships parents have.¹⁹ Students hate being interrupted when focused on the game, so they usually ignore their parents. This causes the declining intensity of communication between students and parents and the weakening of their relationships. A person who started to be addicted to online games revealed that they had communication problems with their parents and were spared little time for family (20). Most games today are played on gadgets. It can be assumed that people spend more time on their devices due to online games' increasing popularity. The use of gadgets by children without good control from their parents can reduce parents' and children's opportunities to have direct communication with each other at home.²¹

4. The Impacts of Parenting Style on Students' Online Gaming Behaviors
Most students addicted to online games said that their parents were authoritarian, while a few students revealed that they had permissive parents. Therefore, it can be assumed that authoritative parenting can incite online game addiction in children.^{22,23} In the authoritarian parenting style, the parents are highly demanding but not responsive. They also restrict their child's autonomy. With such a parenting style, children tend to feel as if they are always prohibited from doing what they like and are required to do what their parents tell them to do. As a result, children will try to find ways to break free from the restrictions. For example, children will protest if their parents prohibit them from playing online games.

5. Online Game Addiction as the Cause of Problems between Students and Parents

Students suffer from a lack of interaction with parents and friends. They often ignore these people because they are too immersed in the game. Students who are busy and focused on the game usually hate being interrupted and become easily irritated.²⁴ The ability of self-regulation influences this. The higher the self-regulation, the lower the risk of smartphone addiction.^{25,26} A study found a significant relationship between communication in dysfunctional families and maladaptive behaviors in adolescents.^{26,27} Although a great amount of time is available for communication. It is not guaranteed that intimacy between family members can be established. Intimacy among family members comes from everyone's ability to understand their roles and themselves and express and comprehend their messages.²⁸ If there is no intimacy between family members, conflicts between students and their parents will be more likely. Family decisions often influence changes in health behavior.²⁹

CONCLUSION

Parenting style contributes to online game addiction. Online game addiction among students causes changes, especially in the intensity and need for communication with parents despite students' good awareness of the importance of maintaining contact with their parents.

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ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has been granted ethical clearance based on the letter of the Medical Research Ethics Committee Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta No.056/EC-KEPK FKIK UMY/II/2021.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Yanuar Fahrizal and Friska Dwi Aprilia designed and directed the project, worked out almost all of the activities in this research. Yanuar Fahrizal performed the measurement and drafted the manuscript.

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