Research Article

Parental Strategic Interventions for Reducing Online Gaming Addiction in Children: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to determine the parents’ interventions towards their children’s online game addiction. This study provides a better understanding of the parents’ perceptions and strategies regarding their children’s online game addiction. This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological research design and thematic analysis. The results of the study revealed that, despite the challenges parents encountered with their children who are addicted to online games, they know the strategies to prevent their children from being exposed to online gaming. These strategies include setting limitations, spending time with their children, monitoring their game content and gaming hours, and suggesting outdoor activities. The study recommends that parents spend time with their children, set limitations on gaming content and hours, and suggest outdoor activities to prevent online game addiction.

Keywords

monitoring, online games, parent intervention, student condition

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The rate of recorded online game addiction is increasing. In 2021, teenagers spent an average of one hour and 46 minutes daily using a computer, mobile device, or gaming console. Among 3,000 students, more than 19% of males and 7.8% of females were diagnosed with a gaming disorder. These figures are likely to rise as technology continues to develop (Yu, Li, & Lau, 2021). Online game addiction, often known as internet gaming disorder, affects both adolescent boys and girls, with boys being more prone to developing this kind of addiction. Parents who lament that their child is "addicted to video games" may be dealing with a mental health issue. Parental intervention is vital in preventing and treating online game addiction in children. Parents play a crucial role in helping their children develop healthy gaming habits and in identifying and addressing any problems that may arise.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Online gaming is becoming increasingly popular among teenagers but has also been linked to some adverse effects. In Singapore, it is estimated that 9% of youths are pathological gamers, meaning they spend excessive time playing video games. Possible factors contributing to this pathological gaming behavior include the gamer's perception of their family environment and relationship with their parents. Online gaming is popular among young people but can also have adverse effects, such as pathological gaming. This is especially important for parents to be aware of, as they can help prevent their children from developing unhealthy gaming habits. This study found that pathological gamers spent significantly more time playing online than non-pathological gamers. They also had a lower perception of their family environment, seeing it as less conducive to living. The study did not find a significant difference in parental relationships between pathological and non-pathological gamers. However, it did find that youth gamers have a better relationship with their mothers than their fathers.

Future research could explore the role of parents in family counseling to improve pathological youth gamers' perception of their family environment. This could help reduce pathological gaming habits in young gamers. In other words, even though online gaming is a popular form of entertainment for young people, it is vital to be aware of the potential adverse effects, such as pathological gaming. Parents are essential in protecting and monitoring their children to prevent them from developing unhealthy gaming habits. One way to do this is by improving the child's perception of their family environment through family counseling (Da Charlie, HyeKyoung, & Khoo, 2011). Parents see current technologies as critical to their children's academic and professional progress. Additionally, children can use media devices for various instructional or artistic purposes. On the other hand, internet use can promote family harmony, adaptability, and responsive communication, as well as positively affect family relationships by encouraging family members to stay in touch, make real-time arrangements, ensure children's safety through emergency communications, improve family bonds, and facilitate parent and child experiences. Furthermore, social media usage may increasingly assist parents in engaging with their children at any time and monitoring their physical and online movements (Procentese, Gatti, & Di Napoli, 2019).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is a model for understanding how different environmental factors influence human development. It proposes that people are surrounded by interconnected systems, from the most immediate (microsystem) to the most distant (macrosystem). The microsystem is the immediate environment, including their connection with family, friends, and teachers. The mesosystem is the interaction between the microsystems, such as how a child's home and school life influence each other. The exosystem is the social setting in which the individual does not directly participate but still impacts their development, such as their parent's workplace or neighborhood. The macrosystem is the cultural values and norms that shape the individual's environment, such as the country they live in or the religion they follow. In other words, Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests that human development is not simply shaped by the individual's genes or immediate experiences but also by the broader social and cultural context in which they live. According to Bronfenbrenner's theory, parents play a crucial role in reducing online game addiction in their children. Parents can influence their children's online gaming behavior through the following mechanisms: setting rules and limits on gaming time, monitoring their children's online activity, and educating them about the adverse effects of online gaming addiction (Henderson, Schmus, McDonald, & Irving, 2020).

Figure 1

The relationship between independent and dependent variable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents Involvement and Intervention</td>
<td>Alleviation of Online Game Addiction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statement of the Problem

The study aims to understand the interventions of parents regarding their children's online game addiction. Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the signs and symptoms of online gaming addiction in children?
2. What socio-emotional changes do these children face?
3. What parental interventions have been effective in reducing online gaming addiction in children?
METHODS

Research Design, Sample and Sampling Technique
This paper is a qualitative study that utilized a phenomenological research design to assess parents’ intervention towards their children’s online game addiction. This study utilized an opportunistic sampling method to select respondents for data collection. The researchers identified five (5) parents as key participants in this study.

Research Instrument
This paper utilized a semi-structured interview method as the main instrument for data collection. The questions were provided to the respondents in advance to enable them to provide substantial answers beneficial to this study. The researcher asked follow-up questions to further explore their responses, which significantly contributed to meeting the study’s purpose.

Data Gathering Procedure and Data Analysis
Before administering the research instrument, the researchers obtained approval from the school administrator and academic coordinator for the formalities of the research endeavor. Subsequently, permission was sought from the respondents for conducting the study. The researchers explained the study's purpose and goals to the respondents. The data collected from the respondents were transcribed and analyzed through thematic analysis, a qualitative analysis method used to describe, summarize, or explain a data set.

Ethical Considerations
The researchers ensured that the data collected from the respondents would be protected and kept confidential, as well as the respondents’ details.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Signs and Symptoms of the Children Having an Online Game Addiction
The findings in this section demonstrate the signs and symptoms of a child addicted to online gaming. Addiction to online games can be hazardous as it causes children to lose interest in activities other than playing online games, neglect their family and friends, and seek psychological escape from their problems.

Table 1
Sign and Symptoms of Online Game Addiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signs and Symptoms</td>
<td>Changes in Behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health Related Problem</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attention Deficiency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Changes in Behavior
Parental challenges are perceived and given importance, as revealed by one of the participants. It was mentioned by one of the respondents that they observe the behavioral changes in their children. According to one of the participants: “My children are becoming stubborn, neglecting to follow house rules, and they get angry easily...”. A review of research on video games found that violent video games make children and young adults more aggressive and less likely to obey authority figures. The study also concluded that violent video games can increase physical arousal and escalate aggressive thoughts and feelings (Anderson & Bushman, 2001).

Health Problems
In parenting children with a gaming disorder, health problems could arise. According to one of the participants: “The children are affected by not eating their meals regularly, and most of the time, they stay up late at night. Consequently, they suffer from weight loss and body pains...”. In rare cases, problematic gaming can lead to various negative physical health consequences, including poor sleep, physical decline, exhaustion, dehydration, and even death. Individuals who spend hours playing video games are at risk of developing other health problems associated with a sedentary lifestyle, such as an unhealthy diet, heart issues, muscle atrophy, and blood clots (King et al., 2019).

Attention Deficiency
One of the signs observed by parents is the diminishing attention span and focus-related issues. Children cannot concentrate on school and household tasks because they are always playing on their phones. As mentioned by one of the participants: “The signs that I observed are, when I try to discipline them, they are not focusing on my words. They can’t finish tasks, or the quality of their work is compromised. Consequently, their grades are significantly affected.”
According to the findings of Kamal & Wok (2020), impulsivity, overactivity, and inattentiveness are among the primary signs of children exposed to chronic online gaming. Online game addiction can lead to changes in the brain that make it difficult to pay attention and focus. These changes may persist even when individuals are not playing games. Students addicted to online games may struggle to pay attention in class and complete their schoolwork, resulting in poor academic performance and failure.

**Changes in Their Socio-Emotional Aspect**

Online game addiction can lead to several changes in a person's socio-emotional aspect. These changes include social isolation, loneliness, depression, anxiety, and aggression. Additionally, online game addiction can have a general negative impact on a person's socio-emotional well-being. For example, individuals with online game addiction may have difficulty managing their emotions, coping with stress, and forming and maintaining healthy relationships.

**Table 2**
*Socio-Emotional Changes Among Children*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Isolation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aggression</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Social Isolation**

Children engaged in online games may spend long hours playing, leading to social isolation. They may neglect their relationships with friends and family and have difficulty forming new relationships. As shared by one of the participants: "...online games can offer youth an escape from the reality of the world; however, without the right guidance on what games to play or when to play, children may lose their sense of reality and diminish their social engagement, resulting in neglect of their relationships with friends and family. This can lead to conflict and isolation." Some researchers believe that gamers seeking meaningful relationships in video games may struggle to form meaningful relationships in the real world. This study examined 168 university students to explore the relationship between social interactions in and out of the game environment, personality type, gender, and game preferences (Uz & Cagiltay, 2015).

**Aggression**

Online game addiction can cause children to have irritability and anger management problems. One respondent stated that if they reprimand their children, the child will exhibit aggressive behaviors. Accordingly, "When he started playing, he had anger issues and would easily flare up, even over minor things...". Kuss (2013) states that bio-psychosocial mechanisms contribute to addiction. Online game addiction can also lead to aggression through a process of frustration. Online games can be very challenging, and players often experience frustration when they lose or cannot complete a level. This frustration can sometimes manifest as aggressive behavior.

**Parent's Intervention Towards Online Game Addiction**

Parents play a crucial role in guiding their children to overcome online game addiction. They can teach their children how to develop healthy gaming habits and prevent addiction.

**Table 3**
*Parent's Action on Their Children Online Game Activity*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interventions of the Parents</td>
<td>Set limits on gaming time</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monitor game content and hours</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spending time with them</td>
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</table>

**Set Limits on Gaming Time**

Parents should collaborate with their children to establish limits on the amount of time spent playing online games. These limits should be reasonable based on the child's age and other activities. As stated by one of the participants: "I set a time limit for their cell phone use and establish rules or tasks that must be completed before they regain access to their phone." The findings suggest that imposing restrictive rules and regulations on children's online gaming behaviors is an effective strategy to reduce addiction. It also underscores the significance of the parent-child bond and potential gender differences in assessing and implementing preventive measures for children and adolescents exhibiting pathological symptoms of online gaming addiction (Choo et al., 2015).

**Monitor Gaming Content**

Parents should be aware of the games their children are playing and the content of those games. They should refrain from allowing their children to play violent or otherwise inappropriate games. According to one of the participants: "I regularly check the phone, particularly the installed games, to understand the type of games and their content. This enables me to minimize exposure to violent games..."
Monitoring children's gaming content is crucial for several reasons. It can help shield them from exposure to violence, inappropriate content, and online predators. Moreover, it can aid parents in understanding their children's interests and identifying potential issues. Furthermore, it can assist parents in teaching their children how to use video games in a healthy and responsible manner (Donati et al., 2021).

**Spending Time with Them**

Spending quality time with children is one of the most effective ways to prevent online game addiction. Children require love, attention, and support from their parents. Feeling loved and supported makes them less inclined to resort to video games for comfort or escape. "I take them out with me or plan enjoyable family activities during outings. This allows us to maintain strong relationships and engage them in various activities away from online games..." Youth gamers perceive their family environment as supportive and affectionate, reducing the likelihood of developing pathological gaming habits. Spending time with children is essential for averting online game addiction. It fosters a sense of love and support, diminishing the inclination to turn to video games for solace or diversion. Additionally, it enables parents to comprehend their child's interests and recognize potential concerns (Da Charlie et al., 2011).

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Conclusion**

Parents of children addicted to online games face numerous challenges, including behavioral changes, dietary habits, and social interaction deficits. However, most parents find solutions to these issues by setting limits, monitoring gaming content, and spending quality time with their children. The study also revealed that parents of students in the institution are aware of the measures they can take to prevent their children from excessive exposure to online games. Ultimately, the study concludes that early prevention of online game addiction is crucial, and parental monitoring of gaming activities is essential.

**Recommendations**

Parents should prioritize spending more time with their children to understand their strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to provide optimal support. Setting limits or conditions on screen time and encouraging outdoor activities are effective strategies. Moreover, parents should limit their own gadget usage and refrain from using electronic devices during family time or meals. Children learn by observing the behavior of adults around them, so setting a positive example is vital. Additionally, involving children in outdoor activities such as soccer, basketball, and other non-digital games can be beneficial. Future studies could explore various aspects of online game addiction, including strategies, attitudes, and the learning environment.

**REFERENCES**


Author(s)' Statements on Ethics and Conflict of Interest

Ethics Statement
The author/s hereby declare that research/publication ethics and citing principles have been considered in all the stages of the study. The author/s take full responsibility for the content of the paper in case of dispute.

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