Chapter 2
The Impact of Family on Digital Addiction: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

As the internet becomes increasingly integrated into everyday life, there is a growing concern on the antecedents that contribute to some of the adverse effects such as internet addiction. Parents are important and influential agents, and their parenting practices may promote or prevent the development of internet-related problems. This chapter provides a review of family factors surrounding child internet addiction such as parental monitoring and parental guidance, parental mediation, internet parenting styles, parental norms and behaviors, parent and child characteristics, family functioning and parent marital conflict, quality of the parent-child and peer relationship and culture as highlighted in previous research. Common limitations on past research on family factors and child internet addiction are noted and future research directions are suggested. Finally, family-based solutions and recommendations to prevent children from developing internet addiction are provided in the light of previous findings.

INTRODUCTION

Today, internet has become a widely used tool for network communication with a huge impact on daily life. The Internet is considered to be one of the most popular leisure time activities for children and adolescents all over the world. Moreover, social networking sites have obtained considerable reputation and have become a leading everyday social routine, which may largely increase Internet use (Müller et al., 2016).

Internet use may promote social relationship among people and created advantages like socialization and increasing self-esteem (Mei et al., 2016). However, along with the widespread use of Internet, there is also a growing concern on the antecedents that leads to adverse effects such as internet addiction. Internet addiction prevalence rate in the United States and Europe has been reported as between 1.5%
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and 8.2% (Weinstein & Lejoyeux, 2010). In Asia, 10% of the adolescents in Park et al.’s (2008) study have been found to be at high risk for Internet addiction. Internet addiction prevalence rates all around the world have called the researchers to better understand this new behavioral problem.

With an aim to shed light on internet addiction, a plethora of studies have focused primarily on factors that may predispose individuals to Internet addiction. There is a consensus in literature that some personality traits such as social withdrawal, introversion, aggression, narcissism, shyness, low self-esteem and poor self-control are significant predictors of Internet addiction (Bozoglan, 2013; Griffith, 1995; Kim, 2008). Although the role of individual factors and personality in predicting internet addiction have been widely investigated in literature, it is also important to look at the impact of environmental factors, such as family factors. Ariani (2018) discovered that there were correlations between family and internet addiction.

Elements of family life, such as parenting behaviors have a profound effect on the development of children and adolescents (Barker & Hunt, 2004). Family factors and parenting behaviors regarding child internet use is necessary to consider when attempting to understand children with internet addiction due to the central role of the family in the development of children and the important roles of family factors and parental attitudes and behaviors in child behavior (Van den Eijnden, Spijkerman, Vermulst, Van Rooij, & Engles, 2010; Yu, 2003). Studies conducted in developed countries reveal that Internet use is mainly home-based. While only 66% of children use Internet at school, 91.2% of primary school children surf on the Internet at home (Lee & Chae, 2007). The wide use of Internet at home also underlines the critical role of parents in providing a controlled and safe Internet use.

Despite the existence of empirical studies on internet addiction, past research has shown that a complete understanding of how children and adolescents develop internet addiction and effective prevention and intervention techniques are limited (Guan & Subrahmanyam, 2009; Willoughby, 2008). This chapter aims to provide an overview of the risk and protection factors for the occurrence of Internet addiction during childhood and adolescence in relation to family context and parenting behaviors. In this context, past research concerning the effect of family factors on internet addiction among children and adolescents have been reviewed and frequently occurring points are explained.

BACKGROUND

Internet Addiction

Though an exact terminology to designate the pathological use of the Internet does not still exist, authors have used different terms to describe the harmful use of the Internet (Abreu, Karam, Góes & Spritzer, 2008) such as Internet addiction (Young, 1998), problematic Internet use (Shapira et al., 2003) or Internet use disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Since this chapter approaches the pathological use of the Internet as a behavioral problem, the term “internet addiction” has been chosen.

Within a medical framework, addiction is described as a psychological and physical dependency on a certain matter (Leung & Lee, 2012). However, no conclusive definition of internet addiction has been adopted in literature yet. Guillot et al. (2016) suggests that main characteristics of the addiction cover frequent and excessive use of online activities and they establish that people that use the internet more than 38 hours a week without academic or work-related purpose are accepted to be addicted. Young (2004) explains internet addiction as compulsive behaviors associated with online activities that leads to