

*Original Article***Family experiences of dependency to internet: A qualitative study***Fatemeh Pashaei*, Khosrow Tavakol**, Nasrin Fanian******Abstract**

Background: Although extensive development of technology provides welfare and accessibility for families but it may be one of the threatening factors for them. The unique characteristics of internet such as availability and facility are useful, but over using for its exciting content cause to internet addiction between family members. The aim of this study was to explain the experiences of the family members of dependence to internet.

Methods: A phenomenological approach was used in order to find the meaning of dependence on internet in family members. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Colaizzi's descriptive method was used for data analysis.

Results: Findings of this study were classified into 60 codes and three main concepts consisted of motivators (directors), complications, and changing life style.

Conclusion: Dependent members of family after tending to internet tolerated some complications like family disjointing and inappropriate change of life style that can be the focus of psychiatric and family health nurses.

Key words: Family, dependency, internet

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Computer technology has been widely extended through the societies and affected all aspects of individuals' life style as in many places such as home, work, education, bank services, purchase and etc which they face with it. Increasing internet users all over the world changes the human life style among them families have a great share.¹

Nowadays, technology development has been provided welfare and facilities for families but it can also be considered as one of the threatening factors for them. Its special characteristics including exciting content, easy access and working, low cost and visual attractions resulted to great attention toward internet all over the world which youths have the great involvement.²

One of the problems resulted from this phenomenon is dependency and addiction to this massive implicit world that leads to many side effects and affects all dimensions of the users' life.³ The low cost and superficial health of this hobby, as well as lack of inappropriate places for the real use of internet (users' disability in doing and receiving standard services such as purchase, booking ticket) leads to improper usage of internet within Iranian families.⁴ Internet typical nature in intimate and process privacy as well as lack of parent's supervision and in some cases parents' usage in the same manner leads Iranian families to overwhelming into this massive implicit and great world that cause many complications.⁵ Hence, this problem needs to a deep and qualitative study for finding

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the experiences of youths about their dependency to internet. The purpose of this study was to reach a better understanding of this basic phenomenon through all the users experienced this dependency.

Finally, recognizing the effective factors on this experience encourage all specialists in behavior affairs and nurses in community health for training and supporting these dependent members to familiar with the realities of life.

This qualitative study has been designed to answer these questions: what is the belief of family dependent members from their life? What are the effective factors in these experiences? How do they adapt themselves with their situation according to this dependency? What are the experiences of the family dependent members?

Methods

This was a qualitative and phenomenological study. Family dependent members on internet were the research population. The inclusion criterion in the study was desire for participating. Sampling method was object-oriented and the sample size was consisted of 10 participants.

A deep and semi-structured interview was done with family members who had some experiences in internet addiction and were interested to participate in this study. The addiction was defined as using internet at least 38 hours for non-occupational and unnecessary proposes. The interview was done in participants' home or room, as suitable and calm places; each interview lasted between 20 to 60 minutes.

All interviews were recorded on tapes and all participants were given some codes based on interviews' time order.

In qualitative studies, the process of determining the validity and reliability is different from quantitative.⁷ In this study, four criteria of "trustworthiness" of qualitative researches means "validity", "reliability" "confirmability" and "transferability" were used.⁷

In order to determine the confirmability, researcher also tried to collect information carefully out of any particular orientation. It was also tried to incorporate users who could de-

scribe their experiences of internet-dependency. Furthermore, whenever researcher felt that information was insufficient and inappropriate, he/she recalled participants again and ask them to explain more precise. Also, since the seventh stage in collaizzi's method is the referring of the researcher to the participants and confidence upon the validity of the collected code, he/she used this stage with respect to all conditions to reach the validity. During concepts analysis stage of the study, it was tried to use the ideas and comments of the specialist to reach the reliability of the research. To increase data transferability, the participants were chosen from two cities (Isfahan and Tehran).

Results

Among 10 participants, 8 were females. The age range of them was between 18-45 years old. Most of them were students and spent 38 hours to internet per week. 6 of them were students, 2 were staffs and the rest were householders and had diploma. Three main concepts (motivators, consequences and changing life style) were derived after analysis of data from participants.

The first concept consisted of some sub-concepts called as internal factors such as enjoyment, implicit world, and external effects like lack of family supervision and easy access. One of the participants told about his/her tendency toward internet as follow: *"I forget all of my sadness while using internet as it is completely different from real world."*

These users considered their internet-dependency because of facing with a new, attractive and exceptional world and finding a large distance between this world and the real one. The users also declared that internet could provide their demands and desires by its wonderful, pleasant and free world.

"I can communicate with everybody I like even with opposite gender and talk about my desires. I can speak to all online persons."

Many users experienced "internet as a loneliness barrier". The changes made in users' quality of life in sequence of dependency to internet were more. Some other main concepts

were acquired by analyzing the users' experiences in using internet which involved four sub-concepts including reduction of social activity, psychological side effects, decreasing family relationship and seclusion.

The participants in current study expressed that the changes have occurred in their lives following their internet-dependency were great. One participant said how internet-dependency has reduced his/her family relations:

"My relation decreased with the family even they call me I never answer them."

There were some significant side effects of internet-dependency on family relations and the psychological aspects so that one of the participants told about internet's harmful psychological side effects such as impatience and depression: *"When I use to use internet I have become more impatient. I cannot tolerate me, myself."*

They pointed to some cases about the lack of verbal relations, petulance, irritation and isolation caused by internet-dependency.

We can also mention to economic loss as a sub-concepts of this study resulted from internet dependency which some participant told some points concerning it, they considered their dependency as a tool of economic loss and wasting their money instead of use it for providing their needs. As one of them said *"I spend 4-5 hours of day to internet while I cost most or sometimes all of my money for it."*

The other extracted sub-concept was the change of life style. The participants expressed that over using of internet led them to many disorders in some life activities such as sleeping and nutrition. Some of them believed that they faced many problems in their daily life activities and they could not manage their life compared to past means before internet addiction. One of them expressed his/her experiences as *"I have become so lazy and reluctant that I could not walk at all"*; about anorexia and distaste for food another one said *"I eat incomparably fewer than my past as if I have lost my appetite during this time."*

Internet created some disorders in life quality of its dependent users such as nutrition, sleep, and daily activities and finally led to change their life style.

Discussion

Three main concepts resulting from this study were motivators, consequences and change of life style. The studies about motivators or internet alternatives showed that related factors of addiction to internet mainly were consisted of longstanding usage, easy and fast access and having relationship skills.⁸ In another study, defiance and lack of family support were of the social factors lead to internet addiction among teenagers.⁹

Fanian et al (2005) also stated that attractive and exciting nature of internet besides its intimate and processed privacy encourage youth and internet users in families to be merged in this implicit world.¹⁰

One of the other derived concepts was consequences in this study. Internet-dependency leads to reduction of family relations within its users and changes of their family processes; as Najmi (2003) declared over using of internet would reduce verbal relations and interpersonal interactions with family members and limit individual's social link.¹¹ Using internet without limitation, decreases physical activity and face-to-face contacts too.¹² Firoozabadi (2005) believed that internet replaces network communication instead of the interpersonal relations which will be strengthened by physical closeness. Most of the relations created upon internet have very weak bases and negative effects on family relations.⁹

Crat et al conducted a research in 1998 for 2 years. He concluded that in families who were randomly given computer training, by increasing the use, family and social relations reduced after 1 or 2 years. Besides, participants in this study suffered from solitude and reclusion and their social communications reduced especially in teenagers.¹³

Ferris (2000) also believed that addiction to internet is a mental-psychological disorder and followed by isolation, exciting anxieties and interruption in social relations.¹⁴

The last main concept derived from the internet-dependent users' experiences was change of life style. Users were suffered from disorder in different aspects such as their life activities,

sleeping and nutrition. In this case, Amini et al (2005) declared that internet-dependent persons are impatient and indifferent to other activity like sport, amusement, trip and family communications.⁹ Roozitalab (2006) also stated that internet addiction causes low sleep efficacy and feeling of tiredness in the users.¹⁰

The researchers' findings indicate that today by developing technology and especially using internet because of its unique facilities such as attractive content, easy to access and work may lead family members to misuse of it and cause dependency to this false environment and occur some damages for secure family especially for

young generation including reduction of family relations, economic complications and insecure family bases create insecure society.

Therefore, providing appropriate preventing plans and solutions to solve this problem and creating a field to use this technology in the correct manner demanded from all responsible managers for education, research, health, and cultural issues that success in solving this problem surly lead to the reduction of its side effects and proper use of this valuable technology.

Also, the authors declare that have no conflict of interest in this study and they have surveyed under the research ethics.

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