

CYBERSEX LEADS TO ADDICTION EPIDEMIC AMONG MINOR: THE ANALYSIS OF CAUSE AND EFFECT

Wan Saidatul Nasuha Wan Maizon
Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
Email: saidatulnasuha26@gmail.com

Siti Nur Fathanah Abd Hamid
Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, 70300 Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia
Email: fathanah@uitm.edu.my

Yarina Ahmad
Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainable Development,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
Email: yarina@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The era of globalisation and modernisation have grown rapidly thus leading to widespread use of technology devices by every generation including children. It is undeniable that this era provides numerous benefits, such as having information at your fingertips, being able to access information from any location by using the Internet and many others. However, if the person excessively uses the internet, it can cause the person to become addicted to cybersex. Due to this situation, this paper aims at exploring factors of cybersex addiction and its implications involving children. Through reviewing the literature surrounding this issue, this study has found several significant factors of cybersex addiction, which are (1) individual factors; (2) parental neglect; (3) peer influence; and (4) advancement of technology. Furthermore, this study also argues that there are two negative consequences of cybersex addiction involving children, which are (1) psychological damages; and (2) physical damages. Children are still young and fragile and; they do not have the capability and capacity to protect themselves. If the issue of cybersex addiction among children continues, it will create detrimental for mental health among children in the country. In addressing this issue, comprehensive cooperation from many parties are required which covers (1) children—have an awareness and high digital literacy while online; (2) parents—close monitoring of their children's activity while online; and (3) government agencies—to formulate policies and effective action plan in curbing the issue of cybersex addiction in this country. Furthermore, the review undertaken in this paper provides significant contribution to the current knowledge and information surrounding the issue of cybersex addiction among children.

Keywords: Cybersex addiction, Internet, children

INTRODUCTION

Cybersex addiction has been recognised as a global issue and requires immediate attention and solutions by all parties including family institutions, society, community, government agencies, non-governmental agencies and the country as a whole. This paper aims to explore the factors and implications of this heinous issue involving children by reviewing relevant literature (to name a few literatures discovered). This is because this papers believes that behind every issue that happening surrounding the society, there are several contributing factors. This paper further argues that every issue will create various significant implications as coin has two sides.

Based on the study conducted by Morris (2018), since the early 1980s, the term cybersex addiction has been used as a concept for analysis and evaluation which is caused by excessive use of technology. The author further stated that cybersex is also known as cybering, internet sex, sex networking, computer sex and tiny sex, but the term 'cybersex' is usually used to define when two or more people engage in sexual conversation through computer network. However, Morris (2018) mentioned in his study that cybersex has strongly evolved due to the advancement of technology where at that time people can access information at their fingertips, being able to access information from any location by using the Internet and many others. The authors further argued that in the 1980s, before the advancement of technology, the only way people communicate with each other was through telephone, fax and CB (citizen band) radio. At that time, all three technologies were used to send dirty messages and to connect with people. For instance, CB (citizen band) radio was recognised as one of the popular technologies for people to use in order for them to be connected with strangers virtually. Furthermore, according to Weigel (2016) in his study entitled 'A History of Cybersex: Dirty Talk, Chat Rooms, and Addictions', the rate of internet usage increased during 1990 to 1993, where in 1990 there was only 200,000 households in the United States which had internet connection but the usage was increased to five million in 1993. This happens due to the price of personal computers which dropped drastically, indirectly influencing many families to acquire computers and subscribe to the internet which are placed in their living rooms, bedrooms or at private places. In the context of this study, cybersex addiction can be defined as one of the social problems of internet addiction and it is happen when children is addicted to watching pornographic materials through videos, pictures and many others, due to their high levels of curiosity. This shows that children are

still young and fragile; they do not have the capability and capacity to protect themselves. Thus, relevant agencies and parties need to curb this issue including parents, society, government agencies and many others.

In discussing further, Maxwell (1996) claimed in his book titled, 'A sexual odyssey: From forbidden fruit to cybersex' that the issue of cybersex arose in the early 1990s. This occurred due to online services which grew rapidly had become the fastest-growing segment in the global media market. The author further stated that the issue of cybersex arose not only because of online services and the global media market, but it all began with the emergence of the internet by two enterprising graduate students from Stanford University who created porn websites which they named 'Yahoo'—an internet portal which combines search engines and World Wide Web sites that cover a variety of categories. They made Yahoo as a favourite internet site of interest for a wide range of users. Shockingly in 1990s, Maxwell (1996) also predicted that the world of cybersex will become worse in the future along with rapid development, globalisation, industrial revolution, economy and many others. This scenario shows that the emergence of the internet access in this era of globalisation and modernisation have caused people to become addicted to cybersex as a result of excessive use of the internet especially children. This is because children are still young, fragile; and they do not have the capability and capacity to protect themselves.

PHENOMENON OF CYBERSEX ADDICTION

To fully understand the issue of cybersex addiction, it is necessary to examine the phenomenon as it exists in all parts of the world. By reviewing literature surrounding the phenomenon of cybersex addiction around the world, this provides a comprehensive view of this issue in various contexts. Based on the study undertaken by Chaudhur et al. (2017), in the context of India, cybersex began to be known by the people since mid-1990s in India, whereby that time the world started with the development of a faster-paced and technological environment. For instance, the authors discovered there was a 28 years old man who engaged in sexual activities at an early age. His friends and him watched pornography when he was 15 years old. At first, he would watch internet porn infrequently, but gradually it became a night habit and followed by masturbation. He also increased the amount of time spent watching porn, in order to achieve the desired level of his pleasure. Moreover, he spent three to four hours every night watching internet porn. If he was unable to watch porn, he became distressed and irritable. Based on this case, this study believes that peer influence arise are one of the main factors contributing to cybersex addiction among children. In the worst scenario, an addiction can harm a person's life through various angles, including mental health problems.

In discussing further, in the context of Indonesian, Agastya et al. (2020) stated in his study that cybersex addiction is recognised as a newly emerging disease and is still in its early stages, although at that time the number of people who were suffering from cybersex addiction was increasing. While exploring sexual issues in Indonesia, the authors claimed that sexuality is commonly assumed to be taboo in the country, but their children have been exposed to pornographic materials. This problem occurs due to globalisation, modernisation and socio-economic changes which are able to give substantial effects on people, especially children who are not able to differentiate between what is right or wrong. Another author mentioned that the issue of cybersex among children increased in New England due to excessive use of internet, where most of the children use the internet for 15.59 hours per week for sexual purposes (Abdi, 2019). This study shows that if children excessively use the internet, it can lead them to explore on cybersex which indirectly can lead to an addiction.

Another work related to cybersex addiction was conducted by Roza (2020), where the author claimed that the existence of new internet norms, a new addiction was arising—internet porn addiction. This research proves that the existence of pornography sites on the internet can be considered as one of the causes to the phenomenon of cybersex addiction among children. By agreeing to the facts, the author claimed one of his clients was inclined to porn addiction through the rabbit hole—associating on a pornographic platform regardless of whether it can be accessed through dark webs or available websites on the Internet. At first, the client did not start to watch it regularly until the client installed a high speed internet and began to stream videos on the phone and iPad. A year later, the client began to watch it every day when he was alone at home. Ironically, he started to watch it in the bathroom of the office and while at the office, and finally, in public places and public transport. This study shows that the rapid development of modern technology causes children to become addicted to cybersex.

Based on the above discussion, this study reviews the literature on the phenomenon of cybersex addiction around the world, while this section presents literature on cybersex addiction in the Malaysian context. According to Zakaria and Baharuddin (2011), the phenomenon of cybersex in Malaysia started when there was modern technology in the country, such as television, CDs, video, audio systems, computers, modems, video cameras, mobile phones and many others. In the research, the authors also highlighted that the internet is recognised as one of the sophisticated media platforms which is able to encourage more people to use it because of the cheap prices offered. Due to this situation, the statistics of internet users increased from 2000 to 2009, which is from 3,700,000 to 16,902,600 users. Following that, the authors discovered that there were two categories of internet users which are adults and children. The first category is adults aged 20 to over 50 years old which stands at 75.3%, while children aged below 19 years old is 24.7%. The data demonstrates that children are not an exception from being an internet user due to it being widely used in Malaysia.

In exploring further, another research was conducted by Hawafi et al. (2017) who highlighted that the phenomenon of cybersex among children occurs when parents only provide little information about sex, communicate on sexual matters through implicit and non-verbal ways to the children since sex is considered taboo and too sensitive to be discussed among Asian families. In addition, the authors also claimed that the actions and thoughts of parents who refuse to talk about sex with their children can lead the children to explore and gather substantial information about sexuality on their own without the guidance of parents due to high levels of curiosity among children. Based on this scenario, parents need to monitor their children while they are online and be open-minded when talking about sex with their children since they are still young, fragile; as they do not have the capability and

capacity to differentiate between right or wrong. Due to this situation, as many as 80% of children aged 10 to 17 years old have intentionally watched pornography through the internet (Bernama, 2019). This statistic shows that the phenomenon of cybersex among children in Malaysia is very worrying and serious.

In addressing this issue, comprehensive cooperation from many parties are required which covers parents, society and government agencies. However, as the closest figure to children, parents have the biggest obligation and responsibility to protect their children from participating and engaging in cybersex activities. For instance, according to Bernama (2019) parents need to improve their internet literacy in order to prevent children to not intentionally explore pornographic material (videos and pictures) while online. This study portrays that parents need to play an important role to combat the phenomenon of cybersex addiction among children, since they are the future generation and talents in the country. Hence, there is a need to explore the factors and implications of cybersex addiction among children.

FACTORS OF CYBERSEX ADDICTION

From reviewing the literature review surrounding factors contributing to cybersex addiction involving children, this study has found several significant factors, which are (1) individual factors (Twohig et al., 2009; Weinstein et al., 2015; Pitchan & Mohd, 2018; Charamaraman et al., 2020); (2) parental neglect (Hidayah, 2018; Shahimi, 2018); (3) peer influences (Kuthoos et al., 2016; Abd Halim, 2017); and (4) advancement of technology (Nahar et al., 2018; Bernama, 2019; Norman & Othman, 2020).

Individual factor—In discussing further, the first factor on the issue of cybersex addiction involving children is individual factor. As revealed by Twohig et al. (2009); Weinstein et al. (2015); Charamaraman et al. (2020), children who are addicted to cybersex years to escape from problems, unpleasant things, loneliness and boredom. Moreover, another research undertaken by Pitchan and Mohd (2018) stated that children who are engage in cybersex activities due to high levels of curiosity about something, not being able to fight the lust in themselves and want to try something new and fun. Then, they decide to spend hours facing the gadget by watching pornographic materials (videos and pictures) and talking to strangers about sex. This shows that children need to find a solution in order to get rid of the loneliness inside them such as participate in leisure activities, sports and join in co-curricular activities in schools in order to reduce the use of technology among children. This is because by participating in sports and recreational activities, it can help to improve children's motor, physical development and cerebral development which indirectly will reduce the level of stress and loneliness (Omar & Latip, 2015).

Parental neglect factor—As reported by Hidayah (2018), nearly one-third of children use the internet and gadgets are as young as one-year-old. Shockingly, the statistic shows that 70% of them are able to fully master using gadgets while in primary school. This issue happens due to having overwhelmed and exhausted parents who are busy working due to today's economic climate. This situation creates high commitment among parents towards working, and the inability to juggle their responsibility towards their children until they leave their children without proper supervision and monitoring mechanisms. Then, the parents will substitute their responsibilities with digital gadgets like mobile phones and computers (Shahimi, 2018). Due to this situation, most of children become addicted to the cybersex attributed from excessively use of internet. This can be proven by Suradi (2019), where his study found that 35.3% of adolescents were exposed with pornographic material (videos and pictures) through the internet while online, and as many as 29.9% of adolescents aged between 13 to 17 years old were involved. This shows that parents play an important role in order to ensure children's personality and behaviour is good.

Peer influence factor—In exploring further, based on the study conducted by Abd Halim (2017), in his study he mentioned that peer influence is one of the factors contributing children to become involved in sexual misconduct that can lead the children engaging in unhealthy social lives. This is because children are still young, fragile and they do not have the capability and capacity to differentiate between what is right or wrong. Following that, another authors also mentioned that peers have a significant influence on the development of children's behaviours and attitudes due to feeling more trusting and at ease with their peers than parents. Due to this situation, if children fail to choose the right peers, they tend to engage in negative habits such as cybersex addiction (Kuthoos et al., 2016). For instance, one of the respondents in this study named Syah (not real name) stated that his friends frequently invited him to watch sex videos and talk about sex with him. Based on this case, this study believes that peer influence is one of the factors contributing to cybersex addiction involving children. Both of these study portray that if children fail to choose the right peers, they will succumb to social problems such as cybersex addiction.

Advancement of technology factor—According to Norman and Othman (2020), advancement of technology is one of the factors contributing to cybersex addiction among children due to excessive use of the internet. This is because children are easily influenced by what they see, especially through the internet which displays violent and immoral elements such as pornography material (videos and pictures), since the children are unable to differentiate between what is right or wrong, they tend to become addicted to cybersex. In relation to a study by Nahar et al. (2018), he stated that children who use technology for eight hours or more per day tend to become addicted to cybersex; and nine out of ten Malaysian children have been exposed to negative things while surfing the internet. This issue happens due to the children simply clicking on pop-up windows that involve nudity or indecent materials while online (Bernama, 2019). This scenario demonstrates that children need to have high digital literacy when using technology in order to protect them from becoming addicted to cybersex.

IMPLICATIONS OF CYBERSEX ADDICTION

Although, there are a number of negative implications of cybersex addiction among children, this study aims to highlight two main implications of cybersex addiction, which are (1) psychological damages (Grubbs et al., 2015; Franc et al., 2018; Sinar Harian, 2019; Norman & Othman, 2020); and (2) physical damages—pre-marital sex (Alavi et al., 2012; Ministry of Health, 2012); becoming a perpetrator of baby dumping (Ab Halim et al., 2013; Bahori & Ismail, 2018; Razak et al., 2021); adverse effects on family relationships (Schneider, 2000; Zakaria & Baharudin, 2011).

Psychological damages—Based on the research conducted by Norman and Othman (2020), cybersex addiction may bring about detrimental effects on the brains of a person which can cause the person to easily believe a false picture of the pleasure of having sex, compared to the reality of real life and will affect one's mental health. The authors further argued that cybersex addiction can also cause children to experience emotional disorders such as shame, humility, loss of consideration and many others. However, in terms of health, pornography addiction causes nerve damage to parts of the human brain, weakening the body's control functions and impairing memory. For example, addiction to pornography can weaken a student's memory to the point where it is difficult for them to remember what they learned in school and cause a person to be lazy to perform worship due to the preoccupation with watching pornographic materials. On the other hand, according to Grubbs et al. (2015); Franc et al. (2018), excessive cybersex addiction can result in negative consequences in terms of disturbances in sleep to a point that it may affect day-to-day life responsibilities as well as result in psychological distress (depression; isolation; anxiety) and psychosocial dysfunction. This is because the light rays emitted through the screen may affect one's sleep and result in a certain level of confusion (Sinar Harian, 2019). Based on these negative consequences, this study proves that cybersex addiction can give psychological implications towards the person up to a point of harming a person's life through various angles, including academic achievement.

Pre-marital sex—In discussing further, according to Alavi et al. (2012), pre-marital sex occurs due to modern technology and high levels of curiosity among children. Due to this situation, it makes them easily involved in pre-marital sex activities. However, the authors also claimed that, children who are involved in pre-marital sex activities tend to communicate about sexuality on social media with strangers such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace and many others. Another research conducted by Ministry of Health (2012) stated that most of the children who are trapped in pre-marital sex activities lack knowledge about sex and skills in protecting themselves from engaging in sexual activity. This issue occurs when children feel they are lacking in love and come from an unstable family, they are easily influenced by their peers and the mass media. For instance, peer influences to have special friends and being challenged by peers to have sex before marriage can lead to pre-marital sex. Aside from this, pre-marital sex can expose children to sexually transmitted diseases at an early age like gonorrhoea, herpes, syphilis, chlamydia, hepatitis, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and many others. Some of these diseases are incurable and can cause nerve infections, cancer, infertility and death. This scenario demonstrates that cybersex addiction should not be taken lightly because it poses negative impacts on children's personalities such as engaging in pre-marital sex.

Becoming a perpetrator of baby dumping—Following that, based on the study conducted by Bahori and Ismail (2018), children who are addicted to cybersex tend to become a perpetrator of baby dumping. This is because when children are addicted to cybersex, they will try to imitate the actions in the pornographic video with another person and due to this action, this may result in having a child out of wedlock. This can be proven by Razak et al. (2021) where the cases of baby dumping increased from 2014 to 2018. A total of 103 cases of baby dumping were recorded in 2014, followed by 111 cases in 2015, 115 cases in 2016, 120 cases in 2017 and lastly during 2018, as many as 128 cases of baby dumping were reported. In order to solve this social issue, Ab Halim et al. (2013) stated in his study, the Malaysian Cabinet decided to classify baby abandonment cases as murder or attempted murder, in order to ensure the inhumane act is punished severely. The murder case is being investigated under Section 302 of the Penal Code (Act 574), which carries the death penalty, whereas an attempted murder case is investigated under Section 307 of the same code, which carries a maximum jail term of 20 years. However, in terms of legal aspect, the cases of baby abandonment are investigated under Section 31 of the Children Act 2001, where the person can be punished to a maximum fine of RM20,000 or imprisonment for ten years or both if convicted. This shows that in addressing this issue, comprehensive cooperation from many parties is required which covers parents, guardians, society and government agencies.

Adverse effects to family relationships—As reported by Schneider (2000), most people who are aged 24 to 57 years old suffered serious adverse consequences because of their partner's cybersex involvement. The author found that cybersex addiction was a major contributing factor to separation and divorce of couples towards their marriage, because most people who are involved in cybersex addiction will lose interest in sex towards their spouse or partners due to the act of differentiating their partner's self physically with the online women or men through the pornography materials (pictures and videos). Then, the partner feels betrayed, rejected, abandoned, devastated, lonely, shamed, isolated, humiliated, jealous, angry, lose self-esteem and many others. In addition, the study conducted by Zakaria and Baharudin (2011) also stated that one of the implications of cybersex addiction among families is divorce and the partners feeling hurt. This is because cybersex addiction causes the users lack of communication in the family and social relationships. For instance, one of the respondents of this study stated that by watching pornography material (videos and pictures) they feel more pleasure than having sex with his or her partners, even just sitting in front of the computer for hours, thus this behaviour will affect their marriage life and eventually lead to divorce. Based on this case, this shows that cybersex addiction can affect family relationships due to differentiating their partner's self physically with the online women or men.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, this paper highlights several factors of cybersex addiction involving children and its implications. Among the factors that have been discussed in this paper are (1) individual factors (Twohig et al., 2009; Weinstein et al., 2015; Pitchan & Mohd, 2018; Charmaraman et al., 2020); (2) parental neglect (Hidayah, 2018; Shahimi, 2018); (3) peer influences (Kuthoos et al., 2016; Abd Halim, 2017); and (4) advancement of technology (Nahar et al., 2018; Bernama, 2019; Norman & Othman, 2020). Technology is recognised as one of the main root causes of cybersex addiction among children due to not receiving proper monitoring and supervision mechanisms from their parents. This is because most of the children have experienced viewing pornographic websites either intentionally or unintentionally while using the internet. This shows that if the children fail to control their usage of the internet, they will face serious social problems in the future which is cybersex addiction.

Following the advancement of technology, proper parental monitoring and supervision mechanisms are also important in preventing children from becoming victims of cybercrime. This indicates that parents need to be role models for their children in order to make sure they have positive behaviour. Aligned with parental responsibility, peer influence is also recognised as one of the factors contributing to cybersex addiction among children due to posing a significant influence on the development of children behaviours and attitudes. Due to this situation, children need to be monitored and supervised by parents in order to curb their children from getting involved in a number of social problems such as cybersex addiction. Even though some children receive proper monitoring and supervision from their parents when they are online, this study argues that since there are a number of internal and external factors contributing to cybersex addiction, there is no one solid solution. This is because everyone needs to play an important role, not only children, but also parents, society and government agencies.

If parents, society, and government agencies fails to address the factors contributing to cybersex addiction among children, this issue will create huge negative consequences such as (1) psychological damages (Grubbs et al., 2015; Franc et al., 2018; Sinar Harian, 2019; Norman & Othman, 2020); and (2) physical damages—pre-marital sex (Alavi et al., 2012; Ministry of Health, 2012); becoming a perpetrator of baby dumping (Ab Halim et al., 2013; Bahori & Ismail, 2018; Razak et al., 2021); adverse effects on family relationships (Schneider, 2000; Zakaria & Baharudin, 2011). By watching pornographic material (videos and pictures) at an early age, this may bring about psychological implications towards children. This is because cybersex addiction may bring about detrimental effects on the brains of children person which can cause them easily believe a false picture of the pleasure of having sex, compared to the reality of real life and will affect the mental health of the children. Following the psychological damages, pre-marital sex is also recognised as one of the negative consequences of cybersex addiction involving children due to imitating the actions in the pornographic material (videos and pictures) with another person and due to this action, this may result in having a child out of wedlock.

Furthermore, aside from pre-marital sex, cybersex addiction can also cause the children become a perpetrator of baby dumping. This is because cybersex addiction can lead to baby abandonment due to high levels of curiosity about sexual activities. Due to this situation, as many as 3,980 children between the ages of 10 to 19 years old become pregnant out of wedlock in 2018 and up to 100 babies are dumped in Malaysia each year and the majority of them were dead when found. Following that, cybersex addiction also can affect the children's family relationships in the future. This is because every child that is exposed to pornographic material at an early age, it is highly possible that they become addicted to cybersex until they become adults. As a result, their partner would feel betrayed, rejected, abandoned, devastated, lonely, isolated, humiliated, jealous, angry and lose self-esteem, which indirectly will negatively affect family relationships. This shows that parents, society and government agencies need to play an important role to curb this issue effectively, since children are the future generation and talents in the country.

In addition, the main contribution of this paper is to upholds the rights and protection of the children. This is because children are still young and fragile; they do not have the capability and capacity to differentiate between what is right and wrong. In this situation, it is become our responsibility to protect them. If the issue of cybersex addiction among children continues, there will be many negative consequences towards the children in terms of psychological and physical damage. In addressing this issue, comprehensive cooperation from many parties and agencies is required which covers parents, guardians, society and government agencies. Thus, this paper has developed an innovative idea during the 3rd Invention, Innovation and Technology Competition (ITeC 2021) which known as 'Child protection recipe: Parenting guidelines to prevent children from cybersex addiction. This parenting guideline is divided into four sections, which covers (1) definition of cybersex addiction—the definition of cybersex addiction is able to provide clear information and better understanding for parents on the issue of cybersex addiction; (2) factors contributing to cybersex addiction; (3) implication of cybersex addiction; and (4) privacy settings—parents will be guided on how to impose privacy settings under parenting control for their children's social media accounts such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram and many others. This indicates that this parenting guidelines to prevent cybersex addiction among children is very important and able to upholds the rights and protection of the children.

As a conclusion, if this issue keeps growing, it will create a worrying situation which may leads to epidemic of cybersex addiction involving children, and indirectly it can affect the mental health of the children. Furthermore, if this issue continues, it may lead to a pandemic of cybersex addiction involving children in the future. This shows that children are still young and fragile as they do not have the capability and capacity to differentiate between what is right or wrong. This issue is crucial to be explored and should be curbed as soon as possible by responsible parties such as government agencies, non-governmental organisations including parents and society. If the issue of cybersex addiction fails to be curbed, it will have a detrimental effect on the society and country.

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