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**MEDIATING ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY FUNCTIONING AND
INTERNET ADDICTION AMONG YOUTH IN KLANG VALLEY,
MALAYSIA**

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Abstract:

Current research aims to explore psychological well-being as the mediating role in the relationship between family functioning and internet addiction among youth in Klang Valley, Malaysia. With the emergence of the positive psychology field in recent years, the focus of research practice has shift from remediating and studying psychological deficits and disability, to the exploration and promoting of psychological well-being while enhancing human strengths. In relation, it is critical to understand risk factors and underlying mechanism through a positive characteristics approach for Internet addiction among youth in order to develop effective preventive and intervention measures. This cross-sectional study includes 130 youth participants who are located in Klang Valley, aging between 18 to 24. A quantitative approach is adopted by collecting data of respondent's level of family functioning, psychological wellbeing and internet addiction through survey forms on online platforms. Current research findings indicate there is a positive and significant relationship between family functioning and psychological wellbeing ($r = 0.385, p < 0.001$), while negative significant relationship was indicated in the relationship between family functioning and internet addiction ($r = -0.230, p < 0.01$), psychological wellbeing and internet addiction ($r = -0.409, p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the data indicated that psychological wellbeing was proven to mediate the relationship between family functioning and internet addiction, suggesting that family functioning predicts one's level of psychological well-being, which then continues to play and important rule in influencing internet addiction. Current research findings

implies that family environments and interactions greatly influence the development of one's psychological state, and further influences addictive/problematic behavior.

Keywords:

Psychological Well-Being, Family Functioning, Internet Addiction

Introduction

Background

Internet and online services serve important functions of facilitating tasks in young people's daily lives due to their multifunctional nature and easy access. The internet penetration rate in Malaysia in 2021 is 84.2%, an increase of 2.8% compared to January 2020 (Kemp, 2021). Despite its advantages, excessive and undisciplined internet use have evolved as a growing problem, especially among younger users aged between 18 to 24 years old (Sharma & Sharma, 2018). Excessive use of the Internet also appears among Malaysian youth (Khodabakhsh et al., 2020). Undeniably, there is a downside to using the Internet, particularly when it becomes problematically addictive and causes psychological, social, school, and career difficulties, leading to impairment and distress while disrupting one's daily life functioning (Kurniasanti et al., 2019; Lin, 2020; Shrivastava et al., 2018; Siddiqui & Singh, 2016).

Over the years of research done on internet addiction, numerous literatures have addressed the crucial role of family functioning on internet addiction as family factors have been shown to shape an individual's development in many aspects (Li et al., 2018; Shek et al., 2019). Psychological research and practices have typically concentrated on researching and treating pathologies using a deficit approach, with the primary goal of lessening the negative impacts of various individual and societal issues (Viejo et al., 2018). Similarly, internet addiction was largely researched and associated with negative psychological characteristics such as depression, loneliness, social anxiety, stress, and aggression

There is an increase of interest in the protective role of positive psychological characteristics in ameliorating the negative outcomes of maladaptive behaviors (Brewer et al., 2018; Casale et al., 2014; Tartaglia & Bergagna, 2019). With the growth of positive psychology, psychological well-being has become the center of psychological research (Vinayak & Judge, 2018). The application of positive psychology may be especially promising in the field of internet addiction because one's sense of self-determination or ability to regulate behavior from within may reduce the likelihood of developing key aspects of internet addiction, such as the inability to regulate web use.

Numerous studies demonstrated well-established correlations between family functioning conditions and internet addiction (Wartberg et al., 2014; Yu & Shek, 2013). The family, according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, is the most direct and influential element of the ecological environment in terms of human development. A dysfunctional home setting can result in maladaptive developmental consequences. Typically, parent's behavioral modelling, psychological support and emotional connections with family members are factors that served as the latter's psychological basic needs are satisfied within a healthy family functioning (Liu et al., 2019).

Ryff and Keyes (1995) developed a multidimensional model, including environmental mastery, autonomy, positive relations with others, personal growth, self-acceptance and purpose in life, which are also known as the Eudaimonic wellbeing terms, emphasizing the actualization of human potential and positive characteristics for an effective functioning (Viejoet al., 2018). Psychological well-being in this approach refers to being able to live meaningfully, taking full control in one's lives, and also building great relationship with others while striving for betterment in oneself. This multidimensional model of psychological well-being is now the most empirically verified and scientifically viable model of psychological well-being (Boudrias et al., 2014; Ryff & Singer, 2013).

According to a review of 42 studies on Internet addiction (Lam, 2016) published in English and Chinese, a variety of different familial and parental factors have been studied, such as family satisfaction, dysfunctional family, parental drinking, family conflict or cohesion, family communication, parenting styles, and parental attitudes towards excessive Internet use. As a result, it is reasonable to believe that the family system has a greater impact on one's conduct than other variables. Habibi et al. (2015) highlighted the relevance of family environment in the escalation of Internet addiction. Cerniglia et al. (2020) found that individuals with internet addiction reported lower family functioning in terms of affective response. On the other hand, Cacippo et al. (2019) found that among Italian adolescents, greater family functioning, such as perceived family interest in activities and more equitable assignment of family tasks were associated with lower problematic internet use. According to Marzili et al. (2020), there is a complex interrelation between family functioning, internet addiction, and psychopathology among university students.

Nevertheless, a research gap remains where the fundamental mediating mechanisms responsible for the connection are under studied (Li et al., 2018). Existing research has increased our understanding of how family functioning dynamically interacts with youth's internet addiction. A focus within the psychological process and internalization processes of an individual should be examined, grasping the opportunity to further broaden our knowledge on the addictive and problematic behavior on youth's excessive use on the internet (Keijsers & van Roekel 2018), therefore develop effective intervention measures.

To date, there has been no study on psychological well-being as a mediator in the relationship between family functioning and Internet addiction. In order to enhance the limited body of knowledge, the aim of the present research is to investigate the influence psychological well-being as the mediating role in relation to family functioning has among youth's internet addiction.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study used a cross-sectional design.

Research Samples

Data was collected from 150 youth aged between 18 to 24 in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. The inclusion criteria were: (a) Participants must be located in the Klang Valley; and (b) Participant's age should be between 18 to 24. The recruitment of participants was done using the convenience sampling method.

Research Procedures

This research utilized an online survey form to collect data. An online Google survey form was provided to participants who were eligible to participate based on the inclusion criteria of the study. The survey form was shared on several online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, and Twitter. Participants accessed the online survey form through a link provided. After providing informed consent, the participants completed the questionnaire in approximately 10 to 15 minutes. Ethical considerations of confidentiality and privacy were assured.

Demographic Questionnaires. Participant's age, gender, educational level and number of family members were included.

The General Functioning- Family Assessment Device (GF-FAD) is a 12-item subscale retrieved from the 60-item McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD). It has a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 'Strongly Agree' to 4 'Strongly Disagree'. The internal consistency reliability of the scale score was 0.93 (Makhija et al., 2019).

Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) Scale is an 18-item scale which measures the six aspects of wellbeing and effective functioning: purpose in life, personal growth, environmental mastery, autonomy, personal growth, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance. It has a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 'strongly disagree' to 7 'strongly agree'. Higher scores indicated better psychological wellbeing. The internal consistency coefficients ranged from 0.65 to 0.87 across the six dimensions (Kim & Moon, 2018).

The Chen Internet Addiction Scale (CIAS) was developed by Chen and colleagues (2003). It is a 26-item self-measurement tool with 4-point Likert scale, from 1 representing 'Does not match my experiences at all', to 4 'Definitely matches my experience'. The scale assesses the five dimensions of internet-related symptoms and problems, including tolerance, compulsive use, problems in interpersonal relationships, withdrawal and health/time management (Chen et al., 2003). Furthermore, it has acceptable internal consistency values, ranging between 0.79 and 0.93 for the subscales (Ceyhan et al., 2019).

Results

A total of 130 youth aged between 18 to 24 were included in the data analysis. Originally, 150 responses were collected, however 20 were excluded from the analysis due to missing data substantial enough to compromise meaningful inclusion or not meeting the parametric assumption. Among the overall respondents, there were 61 males (53.10%) and 69 females (46.90%). Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of Family Functioning, Psychological Wellbeing, and Internet Addiction.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Family Functioning, Psychological Wellbeing and Internet Addiction

Constructs	Mean (SD)	(Low/Moderate/High) Levels of variable	Min. Max. (Reported Score)
1. FF	34.72 (6.48)	Moderate Level	Min: 18, Max: 48
2. PWB	80.91 (14.01)	Moderate Level	Min: 39, Max: 111

3. IA

66.95 (14.84)

Moderate Level

Min: 28, Max: 104

Note. FF = Family Functioning, PWB = Psychological well-being, IA = Internet Addiction

Pearson Correlation was conducted to analyze the relationship between family functioning, psychological well-being, and internet addiction. Table 2 demonstrates the p and r values of each relationship. Firstly, there is a positive and significant relationship between family functioning and psychological well-being. Correlation coefficient of $r = 0.385$ indicated that the correlation strength between family functioning and psychological well-being is moderate. Following with the relationship between family functioning and internet addiction, there is also proven to be a negative and significant relationship between family functioning and internet addiction. Correlation coefficient of $r = -0.230$ indicated that the correlation strength between family functioning and psychological well-being was weak. Lastly, there was a negative and significant relationship between psychological well-being and internet addiction. Correlation coefficient of $r = -0.409$ indicated that the correlation strength between family functioning and psychological well-being is moderate.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis of Family Functioning, Psychological Wellbeing and Internet Addiction

	Pearson's Correlation (R)	Significance level (p)
1. Relationship between FF and PWB	0.385***	<0.001
2. Relationship between FF and IA	-0.230**	<0.01
3. Relationship between PWB and IA	-0.409***	<0.001

Note. FF = Family Functioning, PWB = Psychological well-being, IA = Internet Addiction,

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The mediation analysis indicated a significant total effect of family functioning on internet addiction through path c, $-0.53 (-2.67)$, $p < 0.001$. Following, the Indirect Relationship Effects between family functioning and psychological well-being indicated that family functioning was a significant predictor of psychological well-being, demonstrating a significant effect along a-path ($B = 0.83$), with the results of $t = 4.72$ and $p = < 0.001$ ($p < 0.05$). Then, with the Indirect Effects of the Relationship between psychological well-being and internet addiction (b-path), psychological well-being was proven to be a significant predictor of internet addiction, demonstrating a significant effect along b-path ($B = -0.40$), with the results of $t = -4.31$, $p = .00$. ($p < 0.05$). Lastly, the Direct Effects of the Relationship between family functioning and internet addiction whilst controlling psychological well-being (c'-Path). As a result, the family functioning was no longer a significant predictor of internet addiction after controlling for the mediator, $p = 0.33$ ($p > 0.05$), $t = -0.98$, LLCI and ULCI at -0.59 and 0.20 respectively, with the coefficient of determination for the c'-path (-0.20).

As the model portrayed an insignificant relationship along the c'-path, the fourth requirement of the mediation occurrence has been fulfilled (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Since there was a zero value between LLCI and ULCI, based on a 95% selected confidence, mediation has occurred in the model (Hayes, 2012). Therefore, psychological well-being should mediate the effects of influencing family functioning on internet addiction. Table presented below includes the mediation result with internet addiction as the outcome variable and both psychological well-being and family functioning as predictors.

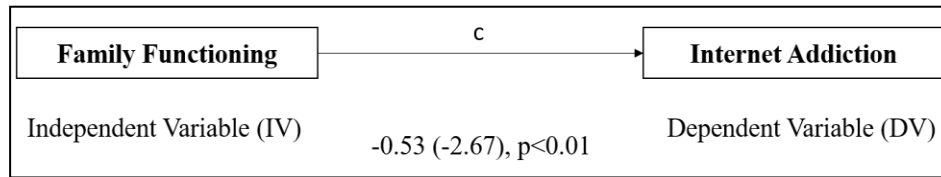


Figure 1. The Total Effect of Family Functioning on Internet Addiction (Path c)

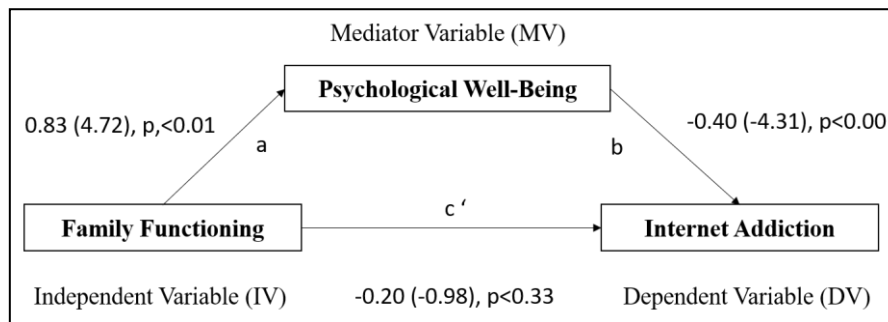


Figure 2. Mediation Analysis Pathways

Table 3. Mediator Effects using Process Macro

Testing Step in Mediation Model	Coeff (B)	T	Significance (p)	95%LLCI	95%ULCI
Testing Step 1 (Path c)					
Outcome: IA					
Predictor: FF	-0.53	-2.67	0.01	-0.92	-0.14
Testing Step 2 (Path a)					
Outcome: PWB					
Predictor: FF	0.83	4.72	<0.001	0.48	1.18
Testing Step 3 (Path b and c')					
Outcome: IA					
Mediator: PWB	-0.40	-4.31	<0.001	-0.58	-0.22
Predictor: FF	-0.20	-0.98	0.33	-0.59	0.30

Note. FF = Family Functioning, PWB = Psychological well-being, IA = Internet Addiction

Discussion

A majority (70%) of the respondents reported a moderate level of family functioning, psychological well-being and internet addiction among youth based on the three-sigma rule (Jaisingh, 2011). Current findings indicated that the study participants experienced a moderate level of family functioning, psychological well-being and internet addiction. In addition, 80 out of 130 respondents (61.54%) reported symptoms of internet addiction. The correlation analyses demonstrated significant relationships between family functioning, psychological well-being and internet addiction. Family functioning was positively associated with psychological well-being, while being negatively associated with internet addiction. Psychological well-being was also negatively correlated with internet addiction.

Several past studies have indicated that healthier family functioning is associated with greater psychological well-being among emerging adults (Chen et al., 2019; Cheung et al., 2018; Desrianty et al., 2021). It is often mentioned that family relationships and an individual's positive characteristics and well-being are strongly related across one's life course, as the operational health of an individual's family system and one's mental state affects each other closely (Láng, 2018). With regard to distinct forms of family dynamics, family is the most direct and recent micro-environment significantly impacts one's overall psychological development (Zelege, 2013). The experiences and environments in the family processes, including social behavior and interaction patterns shown by the parents, forms one's socialization process in early years which then further determine one's personality, social development, emotional domain and overall development (Sowani & Lavalekar, 2020). More specifically, given that healthy family functioning leads to the cohesion and determination of the roles of individuals in the family, further preventing the chaos and fragmentation of interaction within family (Asadi, 2017). Therefore, individuals in healthy families functioning will report higher psychological well-being due to the secure environment (Asadi, 2017).

The finding in the current research indicated a negative and significant association between psychological well-being and internet addiction. Reliance on the internet leading to excessive internet use may occur when an individual lacks motivation or direction in current lifestyle, including the positive psychological aspects which emphasizes meaningful developmental progress. Therefore, excessive internet use allows one to seek momentary pleasure and distraction, in order for them to experience a sense of relief which acts as a form of escape from one's reality or even being able to excel or take control over the virtual view of the world, forming a fictional reality which they are able to construct as they like. Individuals with high psychological well-being tends to experience higher purposeful and meaningful life, finding social relationships satisfactory, participating in daily activities and taking care of others, actively contributing to the happiness of others, seeing oneself as competent and resourceful, believing that a good person lives a good life, being optimistic and respectful about the future, which affects internet addiction negatively (Balci, Karakoc, & Nesrin, 2020). Other than that, according to a study conducted by Sharma (2018) on the dimensions of psychological well-being and internet addiction among college students, similar findings were reported as not only internet addiction was negatively and significantly correlated to psychological well-being, and also to each of the dimensions of psychological well-being such as autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance, suggesting that as internet addiction increases, these dimensions of psychological well-being decreases.

Adolescents are at a stage in life when they are experiencing significant biological, psychological, and social changes (Farhat, 2015; Wu et al., 2016). Those who have difficulty controlling their online activities are particularly vulnerable to internet addiction. However, present study further validates the impacts of positive family functioning and psychological wellbeing can play an effective protective role in responding to adolescent behavior, and the importance of family functioning and psychological wellbeing should not be underestimated. Family-based prevention of internet addiction should be implemented to address this globally problematic issue among adolescents (Wu et al., 2016).

Lastly, the significant and indirect effect between family functioning and internet addiction was demonstrated. Although family functioning and internet addiction reported a significant association during the direct effect between IV and DV, however, no association was found

between both the variables after psychological well-being (MV) was controlled. Instead, indirect effects were found among IV (Family Functioning) to MV (Psychological Well-being) and MV (Psychological Well-being) to DV (Internet Addiction). In line with current research hypothesis and predictions, family functioning was proven to predict psychological well-being, which sequentially influences one's level of internet addiction. Present study also contributes to the contemporary understanding of the internet addiction and family functioning by highlighting the significance of the adolescent's psychological wellbeing on the emergence of at-risk addicted internet. Therefore, to comprehend the emergence of adolescent Internet addiction, current study would further support the study of Trumello and colleagues (2021) by advocating a multidimensional approach that takes into account both family and personal elements must be take into consideration when study the internet addiction of the adolescents.

Taken together, the present findings suggest that people who experience unhealthy family functioning predict low psychological well-being, which further influences the level of internet addiction of an individual. Numerous previous studies have demonstrated that low levels of family functioning were associated with high levels of internet addiction (Caccioppo et al., 2019; Cerniglia et al., 2020; Li et al., 2018; Wartberg et al., 2014), whereby individuals would excessively use the internet as an escape tool when their basic psychological needs couldn't be satisfied by their proximal family functions (Chng et al., 2015). Thus, current study advocate that within individuals level experience low family functioning, this may lead to a decrease in one's psychological well-being, which then further increases the tendency of internet addiction.

Implications

By identifying the role of psychological well-being as the mediator between family function and internet addiction, suitable solutions could be taken by family members, clinicians and public health promoters. Parents should emphasize the practice a healthy family functioning, by actively engaging in positive interactions as well as communication in order to form a healthy family functioning. Also, parents could provide guidance to their children while emphasizing the significance of psychological well-being, with a focus on healthy interpersonal connections, life purpose, and self-acceptance, which exhibits support in increasing one's psychological well-being. Interventions like these might help young people find a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives, which may minimize their dependency on the internet. For youth who have experienced the damaging outcome of internet addiction, intervening from the underlying mechanisms of family functioning and psychological wellbeing through family and individual counseling could be equally helpful.

Limitations

Several limitations in the current study should be taken note of. Firstly, the convenience sampling method used could result in bias and the study is not generalizable to represent youth in the Klang Valley. Furthermore, the data applied in this study were collected through self-report measures such as perceived family function, internet addiction, and psychological well-being. However, self-report tools do not always correctly represent what they seek to measure as the accuracy could be influenced due to subjective judgments or biased responses of the participant. Also, this research adopted the cross-sectional design, whereby the bidirectional relationship between the main variables that occurred overtime might not be detected. Future research is recommended to increase the sample base using stratified random sampling methods so that the generalizability of results can be greatly improved. Also, assigning measures that eliminate subjective judgements in participants' response, while focusing on

alternatives such as increasing the informants (family, close friend), clinical observations and in-depth interviews could lead to more accurate and comprehensive data while minimizing possible bias. Furthermore, longitudinal design studies could also provide a better validation of the mediation model that is currently conducted in the research as this approach allows a more accurate outcome and results by observing and analyzing certain phenomenon overtime.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study found that psychological wellbeing significantly mediated the relationship between family functioning and internet addiction. Current research findings imply that family environments and interactions greatly influence the development of one's psychological state, and further influencing addictive/problematic behavior. Furthermore, family functioning was shown to have a positive and significant relationship with psychological wellbeing. Also, psychological wellbeing has a negative and significant relationship with psychological wellbeing and internet addiction. Lastly, it was shown that there was a negative and significant relationship between family functioning and internet addiction.

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