

Chapter 20

The Effect of Parental Demographics on Parental Assessment of Adolescent Internet Addiction

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates how adolescent Internet addiction is assessed by parents based on children's Internet use time and parental demographic characteristics. The authors measured children's level of Internet addiction based on Young's scale evaluated by their parents to mitigate the social desirability bias in self-reported surveys when children evaluate themselves. Based on Korean General Social Survey data, which is nationally representative in South Korea, they analyzed 219 individuals and found that as the time of Internet use of children increased, the level of Internet addiction evaluated by parents increased. In addition, this relationship was moderated by parental demographic characteristics such that higher age, lower educational attainment, and higher Internet use time tend to decrease the parental evaluation of their children's Internet addiction. Results suggest that policies and programs related to children's Internet addiction should be focused more on parents from specific demographic groups.

INTRODUCTION

Research on the excessive use of the Internet has been conducted based on various terminologies such as Internet addiction, Internet addiction disorder, Internet dependence, and problematic Internet use (Chang & Law, 2008). As diverse as the terminology used, previous researchers developed and suggested various assessment tools such as the Internet Addiction Test (Young, 1998), Internet-Related Addictive Behavior Inventory (Brenner, 1997), Clinical Symptoms of Internet Dependency (Scherer,

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1997), and Compulsive Internet Use Scale (Meerkerk, van den Eijnden, Vermulst, & Garretsen, 2009) (see Chang & Law, 2008). As recent studies from many countries have conducted validity tests of each diagnostic tool, more systematic approaches are being discussed to clearly measure the excessive use of the Internet (Chong Guan, Isa, Hashim, Pillai, & Harbajan Singh, 2015; Hawi, Blachnio, & Przepiorka, 2015; Pawlikowski, Altstötter-Gleich, & Brand, 2013; Tsimtsiou, Haidich, Kokkali, Dardavesis, Young, & Arvanitidou, 2014).

Despite the growing body of studies that have developed various assessment tools, there is a need for further research to overcome the existing issues related to self-reporting methods. Assessment tools based on self-reporting, whereby the rater and the ratee are same so that participants assess themselves, can be problematic because participants are likely to respond more passively when they know that their true responses can be related to the issues of social desirability. One way to overcome this limitation is to diagnose the addiction based on the observations of others rather than self-reporting. Parents are the most appropriate respondents to observe and diagnose their children's Internet addiction since they are the closest to adolescents and also have direct or indirect effects on their children's Internet use. For these reasons, previous research has examined the effects of parental attitudes and demographic characteristics on children's Internet use (Álvarez, Torres, Rodríguez, Padilla, & Rodrigo, 2013). However, to our knowledge, there is a gap in the scholarly literature in examining the parental assessment of children's Internet addiction.

The purpose of the current study is to investigate how parents' Internet addiction evaluation varies according to their children's Internet use time. We also analyze how children's Internet use time and their assessment about addiction conducted by parents vary based on parental demographic variables such as gender, age, education level, and Internet use time. By doing so, this study aims to expand the understanding of existing studies on the diagnosis of Internet addiction by carrying out empirical studies on Internet use evaluation by parents rather than their children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Parent's Role Related to Child-Rearing

According to the literature, parents play two major roles in Internet-related child-rearing. One is an indirect role, whereby information related to children's Internet usage is utilized for the upbringing of the children. Recent parents prefer to obtain parenting information actively through the Internet rather than passively obtaining it from traditional sources such as books and TV (Plantin & Daneback, 2009). The Internet can also provide standardized and generalized information as well as a variety of information based on experience; thus, parents can get ample information related to childcare through the Internet. For this reason, parents can use the Internet as a means of obtaining substantial information related to childcare.

The second and more important direct role of parents about their children's Internet use is to observe their daily Internet activities and provide guidance. More specifically, parents, as observers or supervisors, play a role in regulating, encouraging, and restricting their children's daily use of the Internet (Eastin, Greenberg, & Hofschire, 2006; Lee & Chae, 2007; Rosen, Cheever, & Carrier, 2008; Valcke, de Wever, & Rots, 2010). Rosen et al. (2008) found that parents with authoritative styles are more likely to restrict their children's online behaviors regarding disclosing personal information online and meeting

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