



Online Behavior of Iranian Adolescents Living in Malaysia: A Qualitative Study of Parents' Viewpoints

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Dear Editor-in-Chief

The junction of migration and adolescence as two remarkable milestones of an individual increases the risk of emotional and behavioral issues (1). Similar to other immigrants in other countries, Iranian adolescents in Malaysia are facing several challenges adapting to an unfamiliar new environment and culture which can seriously affect their both mental and physical health status (2). Therefore, they and their families always seek for the solutions to cope with these challenges easier.

The cyberspace seemed to be helpful for immigrant adolescents to adopt faster with their new situation by providing a massive database of useful information about various aspects of the opportunities of new environment and providing shortcut to keep contact with old friends. However, several negative effects on academic performance and mental, physical and social well-being are also reported regarding to problematic Internet use (3).

As the first step in finding an effective solution for different issues is to understand nature of the problem (4), this study aimed to investigate online behaviors among Iranian adolescents living in Malaysia from their parents' viewpoints. Using Snowball sampling, 24 mothers and 8 fa-

thers, aged 37-50 having children aged 12-19 yr old participated in this study and answered to an open-ended questionnaire including 3 main questions regarding to the quantity of online activities (OA), parental monitoring level on OA as well as opportunities and risks of the internet for their adolescents.

Overall, parents reported that their teens spent between 4 and 6 h daily on various OA. Except a few younger parents believing this time is appropriate in the modern life, most of the parents pointed that their child is more involved with OA than it is necessary. However, none of these parents had a serious action to control the time spent by their child on the Internet. Due to the circumstances, they believed their adolescents have no other recreational activities than Internet; as well they have no influence on their teenager to slow down the OA.

A few numbers of participants reported that they had full supervision over their child's OA. However, when they were asked: "with an unlimited internet and a smartphone that are constantly available for your child, how do you keep an eye on "all" his/her online activities?", most often, they eventually concluded that there was no real full control over the OA, given the circumstanc-



es. On the other hand, some participants reported that their teens are aware enough about the online activities' risks and no controlling is needed. Again, in response to supplementary questions, in most cases, long time has passed since the last serious discussion between parents and their teenagers about OA. The majority group included the parents believing they have "partly" control over their child's OA. However, they often believed that limiting and controlling the adolescent is very difficult and often faced with teenage resistance.

Except 3 parents that believed using the Internet would not be harmful for their teens' personal and social health because they are mature enough to have appropriate planning regarding to their OA; other parents believed that if OA were not conducted on the right track and had no proper time limit, it could be harmful. In terms of physical and mental health, parents were most likely to be concerned with lack of mobility, visual impairment due to prolonged use of equipment, isolation, and aggression.

Parents also believed problems such as lack of social skills, diminished comity and emotional relationship with family members, weakness in self-confidence in social, and lack of ability to participate in group activities were the most important consequences of prolonged and inappropriate use of the Internet.

Nevertheless, all families emphasized the positive aspects of the use of the principled and controlled use of the Internet. Access to a broad range of information, increased knowledge of English, easy communication with friends, and alignment with modern society were among the most important achievements of the use of the Internet for parents.

Overall, the majority of the participants believed that the use of unlimited Internet without proper parental control could have serious harm to their teenagers. However, most parents did not want or could not take an effective action to deal with this problem. As well, most parents have long failed to discuss OA of their teenagers with them. Parents' occasional recommendations were also

often faced with resistance or disrespect from their children. Furthermore, some parents are actually satisfied with the fact that their children are engaging in OA without interruptions for hours, although they seem to complain of this and are considered harmful to their child's well-being.

The lack of real awareness about the true realm of the virtual world without proper monitoring and training among parents (even the educated ones) is one of the main reasons for the parents' passive behavior. Besides, the specific problem of migrant parents is that they do not leave much time to interact with their teenagers and look at their child's OA as an opportunity, giving them more time to handle the daily problems.

Easy access to educational and counseling facilities for parents can partly address this issue. Meanwhile, the role of the schools in educating parents and adolescents to deal with the potential risks of cyberspace should not be overlooked.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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