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Nomophobia syndrome and its impact on morale and behavior change in early childhood

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ABSTRACT

Nomophobia has become a prevalent issue which affects individuals today. This leads many to feel constantly connected to their devices. The term, derived from "No Mobile Phone Phobia," describes an excessive reliance on gadgets. This psychological condition is recognized as a global psychosocial phenomenon that influences mobile phone users and affects their morals and behavior. Alarmingly, this issue has also emerged among young children, with many preschoolers showing signs of addiction. This study is aimed at exploring the effects of nomophobia on early childhood, focusing on its moral and behavioral consequences in daily life. The study employed a qualitative case study approach and it involved two 5-year-old children. Data were collected through observations and unstructured interviews with their parents. The findings indicated that excessive gadget used in early childhood could significantly alter children's morals and behaviors. This was primarily due to insufficient parental supervision of their app usage. The study emphasized the need for intervention from adults, including both parents and teachers, who are the closest guardians to children in monitoring smartphone usage. These collaborative preventive measures to monitor and mitigate the negative impacts of smartphone usage are important to do. Future studies for exploring nomophobia in early childhood contexts are encouraged to delve deeper into the surrounding events and circumstances that affect children.

Keywords: Nomophobia; Moral; Changes in Behavior; Early Childhood.

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ABSTRAK

Nomophobia telah menjadi masalah umum yang mempengaruhi individu saat ini. Hal ini membuat banyak orang merasa terus-menerus terhubung dengan perangkat mereka. Istilah yang berasal dari "No Mobile Phone Phobia" ini menggambarkan ketergantungan yang berlebihan terhadap gadget. Kondisi psikologis ini diakui sebagai fenomena psikososial global yang mempengaruhi pengguna ponsel serta mempengaruhi moral dan perilaku mereka. Yang mengkhawatirkan, masalah ini juga muncul di kalangan anak kecil, dan banyak anak prasekolah yang menunjukkan tanda-tanda kecanduan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi dampak nomophobia pada anak usia dini, dengan fokus pada konsekuensi moral dan perilaku dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif dan melibatkan dua anak berusia 5 tahun. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan wawancara tidak terstruktur kepada orang tua. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan gadget berlebihan pada anak usia dini dapat mengubah moral dan perilaku anak secara signifikan. Hal ini terutama disebabkan oleh kurangnya pengawasan orang tua terhadap penggunaan aplikasi mereka. Studi tersebut menekankan perlunya intervensi dari orang dewasa, termasuk orang tua dan guru, yang merupakan wali terdekat anak dalam memantau penggunaan ponsel pintar. Upaya preventif kolaboratif untuk memantau dan memitigasi dampak negatif penggunaan ponsel pintar ini penting untuk dilakukan. Penelitian di masa depan untuk mengeksplorasi nomofobia dalam konteks anak usia dini didorong untuk menggali lebih dalam peristiwa dan keadaan sekitar yang mempengaruhi anak-anak.

Kata Kunci: Nomophobia; Moral; Perubahan Perilaku; Anak Usia Dini.

1. INTRODUCTION

Technological advancements are undeniably pervasive, affecting all age groups, from children to the elderly. Today, nearly everyone utilizes technology for various purposes, and early childhood is no exception, as this age is critical for rapid development. One particular area of concern is children's use of gadgets, which requires careful attention and supervision. Evidence shows that frequent device usage can significantly impact children's development across social, emotional, cognitive, language, moral, and behavioral domains. This dependence can lead to what is known as nomophobia syndrome. While experts do not classify nomophobia as a mental illness, they caution that excessive and prolonged use may lead to various disorders (Mulyani, 2023). Nomophobia is characterized by feelings of fear or anxiety when separated from one's mobile phone, whether due to network issues, low battery, or lack of data (Muyana & Widyastuti, 2017). Research indicates that nomophobia is prevalent in both developed and developing countries, primarily affecting young adults (Qutishat et al., 2020), and is viewed as a modern pathology linked to society's dependence on portable technology.

Individuals with nomophobia typically exhibit four key traits: feeling lost without a device, experiencing distress when unable to access social media, discomfort when not checking for updates, and a pervasive fear of missing out on information (Lesmana & Loe, 2022). This dependency becomes evident when individuals frequently check their devices to stay informed or alleviate social awkwardness. Additionally, those with a strong attachment to

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their phones often experience FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) when they do not check their devices regularly (Safaria et al., 2023). This article will explore the ongoing impact of nomophobia on moral development in young children, particularly in their interactions with adults, peers, and parents.

Buctot et al. (2020) identified several characteristics of individuals experiencing nomophobia, which include: prolonged smartphone usage, consistently carrying a phone charger, excessive worry about losing their smartphone or network coverage, frequently making calls or checking messages, an inability to turn off the phone for 24 hours, reliance on technology for communication while limiting face-to-face interactions, and an increased need for additional funds for smart phones. These characteristics clearly indicate that an individual may be suffering from nomophobia, which can be easily observed in their interactions with others. This is particularly relevant for young children, where such traits can be noticed by attentive teachers and parents. This research employs a qualitative case study approach, focusing on two 5-year-old children. Data collection involved observations made by teachers and unstructured interviews with parents. The data analysis process included data reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions based on the gathered information. Primary data was collected through open interviews with parents following observations of the children's behavior at school.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition of Early Childhood Morals

Morals are a conscious effort made by a person, both adults and children, which is structured or planned to provide opportunities for every individual in the next generation to instill the concept of divinity, beauty or aesthetic values, the concept of good and bad behavior, and foster an attitude of responsibility (Khaironi, 2017). Furthermore, morals can also be defined as something that will bring harmony to a family relationship consisting of father, mother and children. With moral education in a family it will provide awareness to each family member about various moral education such as role models (Cholimah et al., 2023). Because moral education is so important to be stimulated from an early age, the people closest to the child have a very important role, such as family when the child is at home and teachers when the child is at school (Ariani, 2022).

In the process of instilling moral education in children means training or educating children to be able to develop their moral intelligence. This means that this process has several principles in introducing it to children, namely: (a) parents or teachers must be able to establish good communication with children both verbally and in other forms; (b) provide a good example to children in the form of words and actions; (c) parents and teachers give children freedom to act as long as it is within reasonable limits and does not violate established ethics and norms; (d) provide good advice and motivation during teaching; (e) can provide direction using kind and polite words when the child behaves unkindly and does not make the child afraid and traumatized; (f) do not give direct punishment but provide guidance so that they do not repeat bad behavior (Fitri & Na'imah, 2020).

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2.1. Nomophobia Syndrome Concept

Nomophobia is not a foreign term for some people. Nomophobia is an abbreviation of no-mobile-phone-phobia which means a feeling of anxiety or discomfort that arises when a cell phone is not nearby (Mulyani, 2023). It was further explained that the concept of nomophobia is a person's tendency to always be on or close to gadgets and there is a feeling of excessive fear and anxiety if they do not use gadgets (Ghofur & Halimah, 2022). It can be concluded that nomophobia syndrome is a feeling of excessive anxiety and is a symptom of bad disease when being away from gadgets. If nomophobia syndrome is ignored continuously, it will have a bad impact not only on physical problems but will also be disturbing and become a problem in social problems and decreasing children's academic performance at school (Aksa & Rahmatullah, 2023).

Excessive gadget use can lead to heightened anxiety when individuals are separated from their devices, particularly impacting young children who are allowed prolonged access. Nomophobia syndrome can result in several negative consequences, including sleep disturbances. A 2012 study by Boston College found that 75% of children aged 9 to 10 struggled with sleep due to unsupervised gadget use. Additionally, such overuse can foster aggressive behaviors stemming from the content children consume on their devices, hinder brain development, create a dependency on gadgets, and potentially lead to mental health issues in children.

3. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative case study approach, focusing on a thorough investigation to gather detailed information about a specific event or case using various data collection methods (Kamil et al., 2023). The study sample comprises two 5-year-old children, referred to as NA and HSS. Data collection methods include observations and unstructured interviews with parents and classroom teachers. The data analysis follows the Miles and Huberman framework, which includes stages of data reduction, presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification (Kamil & Anggraeni, 2023). A study by Jilisha et al. (2019) highlights that the use of gadgets in daily life often lacks clear boundaries, necessitating collaboration between educational institutions and the healthcare sector to address the issue. This study underscores the importance of coordination between education and health in understanding this phenomenon.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of observations carried out by the teacher for approximately a month revealed the fact that there were 2 children who experienced changes in behavior during the learning process. This is characterized by the initial symptoms of the child looking lethargic and not as enthusiastic as in the previous weeks. Apart from that, the tendency to ask what time school will finish is also a concern for teachers. This kind of phenomenon refers to the definition of nomophobia which means NO Mobile Phone PhoBIA which in Indonesian can be interpreted as anxiety, fear, nervousness or discomfort that is unnatural and common when someone cannot access a cell phone (Yousefian & Khodabakhshi-Koolaee, 2023)**.** The differences in the two children's attitudes are very clear even though the symptoms shown are not the same. However, from the body movements and behavior observed by teachers starting from coming to school,

during learning, taking breaks until going home is very visible. Changes in children's behavior are assessed when children communicate with peers who tend to use physical violence if their requests are not granted by other friends. Apart from that, both children experienced unstable emotional changes.

Children with the initial NA change in behavior as evidenced by changes in the language style used both with teachers and peers. At first this did not really concern the teacher, but habits like this that continued to occur gave rise to negative speculation that children with the initials NA had watched shows containing this type of language. The resulting changes in behavior were seen when the child was interacting with peers who were involved in a small dialogue, then NA lightly and easily raised his hand while sticking out his middle finger. This immediately made his other friends react and tell the teacher. Basically, doing the middle finger doesn't attract much attention, it's just that at that time children indicate this activity with a form of dirty talk which is a trend from Western countries. In fact, they do not know the meaning of the middle finger, but the influence of the device is what causes this.

The first step taken by the teacher in handling this case was to let the child do this while explaining slowly that it did not have a good meaning. However, after the next few days, this still happened so often that it made his other friends uncomfortable and made it seem like it was a joke that was okay if it continued. Then the teacher takes the initiative to approach the child by asking whether the child knows the meaning of what he has done. Then the child answered that according to him, middle finger was a form of dirty talk that could be expressed not in words but using body parts. As if this explains that children understand and understand that body parts other than the mouth can speak using sign language.

Then the teacher took the second step by asking NA's parents how their daily life was at home. The results of the interview revealed that NA recently often spent time in front of a smartphone screen without sufficient supervision. Sometimes the use of this device becomes a diversion for parents so that NA does not make things difficult for parents when completing homework. Apart from that, the teacher asked the parents how much time they spent in front of the cell phone screen and what applications NA usually looked at while playing with the cellphone. From the parents' statements, information was obtained that their children were happy with the YouTube and TikTok applications which were able to spend more than 2 hours.

The final step taken is to inform the child's behavior while at school in the last 2 weeks. Apart from that, teachers advise parents to provide time limits and assistance while their children interact with cell phones, especially those connected directly to the internet network. In essence, what NA has done while using a cell phone is not wrong if it is accompanied by parents. At a minimum, its use must be limited to the time of day or what applications can be accessed. However, the steps that parents can take are not the only ones, parents can also make a diversion by inviting children to read books or play other activities that do not contain gadget elements.

The moral and behavioral changes in the second child with the initials HSS are shown by symptoms of no longer liking playing with peers. Even though a month ago, HSS really liked playing in groups with other friends, apart from that, he was a child who was very popular with his friends, whether studying or playing. After further investigation by teachers and unstructured interviews with the parents concerned, information was obtained that some HSS homes had not yet installed wi-fi. Apart from that, HSS has just been bought a new cellphone

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by his parents which has resulted in HSS being free to use the device while at home after school. Other information obtained by the teacher is that HSS's habits are speculated to be changes in morals and behavior while at school. It is known that HSS often invites his friends from around the house complex with an age gap of around 3-4 years. This means that the children who play at the HSS house are elementary school children. Parents also added around 2-3 hours HSS and his friends were able to spend time in front of their gadgets. A study revealed that the phenomenon experienced by HSS has a significant relationship between nomophobia and monthly family income, parents' employment status and the age when a person owns a smartphone, the time in hours per day spent using It (Kaur et al., 2021). This is what HSS is also experiencing.

The common thread is that basically using devices to search for information and learn many things is not a problem. It is just that young children, who are in their golden years, must be accompanied by their parents. If this is not done, it will have a significant impact on all of the child's development, such as morals and changes in behavior. Apart from that, prevention is also needed from teachers who work together with parents to always carry out supervision both at school and at home so that unwanted things and content are not accessed by children. In psychology, the tendency towards gadgets, whether it is just holding them or actually being addicted, is called nomophobia.

Nomophobia typically affects children aged 9 and older, as well as teenagers and adults. However, this phenomenon has recently begun to extend to early childhood. An article by Al-Mamun et al. (2023) noted that nomophobia syndrome is now prevalent among high school and university students, who often use social media platforms like Facebook. This trend can lead to various negative effects, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, hyperactivity, and stress. Consequently, it is essential for multiple stakeholders to collaborate in order to mitigate these impacts.

The reality on the ground is that it should state that morals and behavior should be instilled in children from an early age. This certainly has a reason because morals and behavior will shape children to have character and noble morals. Supported by opinions from Khaironi (2017) which defines that the instilling of moral values should be carried out from an early age with the aim that children have ethical values in life, understand good and bad values, have noble morals and have noble character. Instilling morals and behavior in early childhood can be done from the surrounding environment, both family and school. This means that every party has a role in this matter. This moral understanding is in contrast to the incident that the researcher has described, in the case of NA doing the middle finger on several occasions while at school. In essence, doing this will not contain anything, it's just that for children this activity is associated with doing indecent things even though they generally don't know what indecent things are.

HSS’s experience of being allowed unsupervised access to smartphones at home raises concerns about potential exposure to inappropriate content, especially when older children are involved. The parents of HSS believe that granting their child access to a smartphone is an expression of love, thinking it helps combat loneliness. According to Fahira et al. (2021), individuals who feel lonely often resort to higher smartphone usage, suggesting that increased loneliness correlates with excessive gadget use. This can lead to a loss of self-control (Fajri & Karyani, 2021), ultimately harming moral development and altering behavior.

As educators, it is crucial to adopt certain principles to nurture morality in young children (Fitri & Na'imah, 2020a). These principles include fostering two-way communication, serving as role models, providing appropriate opportunities for children to make accountable choices, using respectful language, consistently motivating children, and addressing inappropriate behavior with wisdom rather than punishment. Gonçalves et al. (2020) note that excessive used of smartphone negatively impacts social interactions, educational contexts, and overall well-being. Individuals may struggle more with social and interpersonal issues, leading to moral and behavioral changes. Many children today neglect essential communication skills, such as maintaining eye contact and responding appropriately. They, however, tend to engage with their devices over conversing directly. While smartphones can enhance social interaction and communication, their use of gadget should be moderated to prevent issues like nomophobia. In a technologically advanced era, it is essential to instil responsible usage practices from an early age (Fadhilah et al., 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

The research findings indicate a clear need for intervention from adults, including both parents and teachers, who are the closest guardians to children in monitoring smartphone usage. Excessive access to smartphones could negatively impact children's morals and lead to behavioral changes that may be concerning. This study specifically examines moral development and behavioral shifts, which can often be observed by others. Future researchers exploring nomophobia in early childhood contexts are encouraged to delve deeper into the surrounding events and circumstances that affect children.

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