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Efforts to Improve Family Functioning in Preventing Gadget Addiction Behavior in the Alpha Generation

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Abstract

This research discusses efforts to improve family functioning in preventing gadget addiction behavior in the alpha generation from the Social Welfare discipline. The increasing number of gadget users in Indonesia motivates this research, leading to the problem of gadget addiction among the alfa generations. The study aims to describe the condition of family functioning and the condition of the device used by the alpha generation in the Indonesian Family Camp Community (IFCC). This research employed qualitative methods with a descriptive type through literature studies and interviews with four families with the alpha generation and IFCC parties. The research revealed that the family functioning conditions of the four families were functioning well. However, there were several things in the functioning conditions of the four families that were not functioning well, which caused the condition of gadget use by the alpha generation to show characteristics of gadget addiction, namely the condition of communication in Family 2, which was closed and indirect; narrow and fixed affective responses; and the absence of regulations on the use of devices to control family behavior. Therefore, improving family functioning in preventing device addiction behavior could be enhanced by improving family communication skills, increasing family behavioral control, and increasing affective responses. In this case, IFCC could help with joint cooking sub-activities, parenting seminars, and fun games containing traditional games.

Keywords: Family Functioning; Gadget Addiction; Generation Alpha; Child Welfare

Introduction

Technological developments, from time to time, continue to become more sophisticated. Humans continuously innovate and create solutions to simplify work. In this case, gadgets are a sign of the progress of technological developments today.

Device users in Indonesia have proliferated, as indicated by the media stating that Indonesia is among the ten countries with the most gadget users in the world (Yunita et al., 2021, h. 72). Based on a

statement from the Ministry of Communication and Information (2021), the number of smartphone users in Indonesia has reached 167 million people or 89% of the total population of Indonesia. The number of smartphone users increased compared to 2019, with 92 million in Indonesia. This data shows that smartphones are a source of need and support for people's lives today, with various functions for using the internet, playing online games, and shopping. These technologies can help people with their activities and thus encourage other people to try and use smartphones (devices).

Gadget users have almost spread to all generations of society in Indonesia, down to the younger generation, namely the alpha generation (2010-2025). The alpha generation, or digital generation, is the first generation that has lived alongside digital technology since birth (Muhajirin, 2021). People in this generation are still children under 12 years old, still attending elementary school level. They have also been familiar with technological developments even from an early age.

Due to their relatively young age, the alpha generation tends to use gadgets as a medium for their daily entertainment. The alpha generation frequently uses devices only for playing online games and social media. Shoukat's study reveals that younger children are more likely to be exposed to gadgets and have a greater risk of device misuse (Jati, 2021). It shows that the alpha generation tends to misuse devices more than the millennial and Z generations. This condition indicates that the alpha generation requires stricter supervision from their parents. If parents do not provide optimal supervision, the alpha generation will experience device misuse and tend to use devices excessively without paying attention to time limits or experience gadget addiction. Lack of parental supervision over children's device use can be considered child neglect. One of the causes is family dysfunction, or a family that is not functioning well (Nastia et al., 2022).

Gadget addiction's influence on family functioning has been a subject of many studies. The less optimal the family's functioning, the higher the tendency for someone to become addicted to devices, especially children (alpha generation) (Fitaloka, 2021; Mariyanti et al., 2021; Chasanah, 2017). Therefore, gadget addiction is thought to originate from poor family functioning so that family functioning cannot run optimally and in balance. Based on the research results of Toda and Ezoe (2008), it is known that there is a relationship between gadget addiction and attitudes toward parenting patterns (Mariyanti et al., 2021, h. 17).

Previous studies show that gadget addiction in children is closely related to family conditions. However, few researchers still discuss in more depth the efforts made to overcome this using a family approach. The condition of family functioning, which includes parenting patterns and supervision by parents and guardians, significantly influences the use of gadgets by the alpha generation. It means efforts are needed to increase family functioning in preventing gadget addiction in the alpha generation. One of the platforms that provides efforts to overcome gadget addiction in children is the Indonesian Family Camp Community (IFCC).

IFCC's main objective is to reduce device use, prevent device addiction in families, and improve family functioning through family quality time. IFCC's main activity is camping with family. The camp activities consist of various sub-activities, namely sharing sessions, talk shows, storytelling, cooking together, building tents, parenting seminars, health education, nature exploration, character building for children, and fun games in traditional games (Komunitas, 2020). Families who join IFCC, on average, have children who are addicted to devices. Most of their children spend a lot of time using devices to access social media or play online games.

On that account, researchers conducted this study to examine further ways to improve family functioning in preventing gadget addiction behavior in the alpha generation through various activities carried out by IFCC.

Method

This research employed a qualitative method with a descriptive type by describing facts related to efforts to improve family functioning in preventing gadget addiction behavior in the alpha generation through IFCC. This research was conducted in IFCC, a community that works to reduce the use of gadgets and to avoid gadget addiction in families. The study was conducted from September 2021 to June 2022, using some literature studies and in-depth online interviews as data collection techniques. Using a purposive sampling technique, the informants for this research consisted of 4 families with the alpha generation (parents and children) and the head of IFCC. Data analysis was carried out through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding by categorizing the data according to the research focus. To improve data quality, researchers triangulated data sources by interviewing other family members, namely older children.

Results and Discussion

A family is a unit of life that a person has from the beginning of life psychologically, physically, and emotionally (Collins et al., 2010, h. 31). In this case, family functioning is defined as the extent to which interactions within the family contribute to the physical and emotional health of its members (Epstein et al., 2003). To answer the research objectives, this section explains the conditions of family functioning; conditions of gadget use by the alpha generation; and efforts made.

This research uses the McMaster Model of Family Functioning (MMFF) framework to describe the family functioning condition. This framework consists of the dimensions of problem-solving, communication, role, affective response, affective involvement, and behavioral control.

The dimensions of problem-solving are described by Epstein et al (1978) and Miller et al (2000) (in Chasanah, 2017) describe the family's ability to resolve problems to the stage in which the family can function effectively. Based on the data obtained, it was known that Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 solved problems using joint discussions. However, in practice, it had a different method. Family 1 discussed the problem directly. Families 2, 3, and 4 postponed it first. Family 1 solved problems by discussing directly, "...we chat as usual if there is a problem...Yes, together with my husband, we chat and discuss together what to do if there is a problem like this..." (W, Parent 1, March 2022). Fathers and mothers mostly carried out this discussion; they thought together about solutions to problems that arose. "Sometimes you just talk, what do you want to do, what do you want and what solution is like that and where do you want to take it like that." (W, Parent 1, May 2022). It was inseparable from the father's character as the head of the family, who did not like postponing problems. Thus, when a problem occurred, this family immediately discussed it and looked for a solution.

Family 2 solved problems by a combination of discussing it directly and postponing it first. This was because both parents had different perspectives and ways of solving things. "Let's just chat...Let's finish it, okay, because I'm a man, so let's just be straight to the point, okay? So yes, my wife's way of solving it is persuasive, yes, it's more like telling a story first, making assumptions first, like that." (R, Parent 2, March and May 2022). The difference in how to solve problems between father and mother meant that when faced with a problem, family 2 tended to delay solving it. After both parents agreed on the steps for the solution, a discussion was held with the child concerned. This was done so that children did not experience confusion due to differences in the views of their parents. However, the problems encountered by families could still be resolved.

Family 3 solved the problem by not having a direct discussion, but keeping quiet first so that the child was aware of the mistake, "I usually leave it alone...My child already understands that, like 'oh mom is being like this, that means I'm doing something wrong' like this like that..." (E and C, Parents 3, March and May 2022). Parents in Family 3 did this intending to give their children the opportunity to think about their mistakes.

The first step taken by Family 4 was to calm themselves down first. "...don't let it happen when emotions are still running high, still running high, so let's not come face to face with him, that could make his emotions even stronger. because when the two of us are together, we are already relaxed, in other words, whatever we discuss, can enter and be digested in our minds, because we are already relaxed..." (C, Parent 4, May 2022). This was done so that all family members, especially parents and children, could think more clearly in seeing the problem. After that, they sat together to discuss the problems they are facing. "Let's have a discussion, sit together, chat together." (C, Parent 4, May 2022).

Viewed from the problem-solving dimension, the family functioning of the four families can be said to be functioning well. The interactions that occur within the family describe the dynamics that exist within the family in solving problems. Epstein et.al (1978) explained that there are 7 stages in solving problems: problem identification; determining the source of the problem correctly; developing various alternatives to solve problems; determining the steps that need to be taken; taking action; monitoring of steps taken; and evaluation. From the previous explanation, it can be seen that the four families have attempted to solve problems through discussion. Interestingly, families can identify problems and emotions that arise in the family. They also understood that when their emotions were unstable, they did not force themselves to have direct discussions. This means that they can map out which things should be prioritized for completion. When emotions are high, the urgent effort to get it done is to get it done. As stated by Lazarus & Folkman (1984: Herman & Tetrick, 2009) one strategy that can be used to solve problems is emotion-focused coping which focuses on minimizing the emotional results of the problems faced. After the emotional impact can be overcome, the family thinks about various possibilities for dealing with it, or what Lazarus & Folkman call it (1984: Herman & Tetrick, 2009) as problem-focused coping.

The second dimension is communication, which is described as the family being able to communicate openly and directly to convey certain opinions and desires (Epstein et al., 1978). In this case, Families 1, 3, and 4 had open and direct communication between family members. Children could talk about the problems they face in their lives, including in terms of school matters and friendships as experienced by Family 3 below, "...they also like to tell stories like 'yes, I was at school like this', or for example, right now playing at home 'yes I was playing this', 'my friend is like this' and that. Yes, they will tell you straight away, automatically." (C, Parent 3, May 2022).

Likewise, with families 1 and 4. "Yes, so if there is a problem, they immediately talk to us like 'mum, I'm sorry', like that... They also like to talk about their friends at school. "Thank God, our family is all open... Yes, we have always been the same like this from the beginning" (W, Parent 1, March 2022). This condition illustrates that the communication that occurs in their family is open and two-way. Not only parents to children but also children can easily convey what they feel and experience. Therefore, the functioning conditions of Families 1, 3, and 4 in terms of communication can be said to be functioning well.

On the other hand, Family 2 owned closed and indirect communication among family members because the children put up barriers with their parents, "Now in middle school, there are barriers, because they are transitioning from small children to teenagers, that's how it is. So the child is a little less open and then the child is quite quiet, so quiet and won't say anything if he's not asked. They're closed, aren't they?" (R, Parent 2, May 2022). As a parent, R found it difficult to know what happened to his child.



Volume 7, Issue January, 2024

Even the efforts made by parents to get closer so that their children would open up more are not easy. This was especially felt when their children entered adolescence. The functioning condition of Family 2 in terms of the communication dimension can be said to be not functioning well.

In the role dimension, a family that can distribute tasks (responsibilities) fairly between its members and has certain standard rules in carrying out its roles can be said to be a well-functioning family (Epstein et al., 1978). The field findings show that Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 were able to distribute tasks and responsibilities fairly between family members, namely based on the roles of father, mother, and child. Apart from that, the division of tasks and responsibilities was also carried out well by all family members. This could be seen from the fulfillment of instrumental and affective needs. Fulfillment of these instrumental needs could be performed by earning a living, meeting family needs arranging all family needs, and regulating children's behavior, likewise with affective needs namely by guiding children through providing good examples and advice. Likewise, children's roles related to studying, following parents' orders, and carrying out homework. This shows that the roles of fathers and mothers from Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 are carried out well, namely by giving responsibility to the children. Therefore, the functioning conditions of Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 in terms of role dimensions can be said to be functioning well.

Regarding the affective response dimension, families who can show emotions according to the context of the situation when stimulants appear, when responding are not stuck in just one way, and display their emotions at normal levels can be said to be included in well-functioning families (Epstein et al., 1978). Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 showed different responses in the context of different situations, namely in good situations and bad situations. In a good situation, the four families showed a happy response when their child won a competition, as expressed by Family 2, "Yes, we are happy if he wins the competition, okay?" (R, Parent 2, March and May 2022). When their children achieved achievements, they also gave appreciation in the form of gifts. "Happy, we are happy. Sometimes we give rewards. If we have good luck, we will give it to them and ask them what they want. Every time they have an achievement, they always say that. 'Wow, you have to get a reward, what do you want? Do you want shoes or a bag', 'Let's go' I said." (C, Parent 4, March and May 2022)

Likewise, in bad situations, the four families showed a response that was accepting, patient and remained optimistic when the child failed to win a competition or the couple experienced failure at their job as expressed by Family 4 below, "Yes, my response is normal, yes, we just ask." What was the problem in the past they had also tried that, so it's okay, so am I. Now, it's the same." (C, Parent 4, May 2022). Parents continued to encourage their children, as expressed by the family, "We must also give support or encouragement, if we are disappointed because we didn't win, how can he do that? He's the one who does it like that. He must be even more disappointed than us, he must be even sadder, right?" (C, Parent 3, May 2022). They did that because parents were aware of and could empathize with their child's condition. The response given by the family when the situation was good or bad showed an affective welfare response which showed feelings of security such as feelings of love, affection, happiness, and joy.

In the dimension of affective involvement, well-functioning families tend to have empathetic affective involvement, namely involvement that focuses on feelings when the situation is happening and is shown sincerely (Epstein et al., 1978). In this case, Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 owned empathetic affective involvement given in good situations, namely giving praise, spending time with family, and giving gifts in the form of rewards. Likewise, in bad situations, Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 had empathetic affective involvement by accepting, trying to understand the emotions that children felt when they failed, providing support, and appreciating and accepting when family members failed to achieve. In this case, Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 showed evidence of empathetic affective involvement by providing this affection through



Volume 7, Issue January, 2024

feelings to prove their affection for family members. Therefore, the functioning conditions of Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 in terms of the dimension of affective involvement can be said to be functioning well.

In addition, in the behavioral control dimension, well-functioning families tend to have flexible behavioral control, namely behavioral control of which implementation takes into account the current situation and allows for negotiation between family members (Epstein et al., 1978). In this case, Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 had flexible eating pattern behavior rules, sleep pattern behavior rules, and flexible social pattern behavior rules. The dietary behavior rules of the four families included eating regularly, not snacking carelessly, and eating in a sitting position. Behavioral rules for sleeping patterns also included sleeping not too late at night by limiting sleep hours from night to early morning and carrying out rituals before going to bed. Likewise, with social patterns, behavioral regulations were in the form of being given the freedom to be friends with anyone with the rules not to get too close and look for good friends. On the other hand, Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 did not have regulations for using devices in the form of time limits for using devices and only reminded them as expressed by Family 1 below, "There are no regulations, yes, they only remind us, like don't play on your cell phone too late." and don't play on your cellphone too often..." (W, Parent 1, March 2022).

In this case, it can be said that Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 had mostly flexible behavioral controls that only apply to eating, sleeping, and social behavior rules. Meanwhile, regarding the use of devices, all families showed that they did not apply the behavioral control dimension. All families did not have clear rules regarding the use of devices. Nevertheless, the functioning conditions of Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 in terms of the behavioral control dimension can be said to be functioning quite well.

From the overall relationship between the field findings and the dimensions of MMFF family functioning above, the family functioning dimensions of Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 mostly indicated the condition of well-functioning families. This can be seen from the dimensions of a well-functioning family, namely the dimensions of problem-solving, roles, affective involvement, and behavioral control, likewise with the communication dimension for Families 1, 3, and 4.

There were several things in the functioning conditions of Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 that were not functioning well and needed to be improved. First, the communication conditions among family members in Family 2 were closed and indirect. In this case, it might cause obstacles in communicating and conveying opinions between family members resulting in less family interaction. Second, the affective response of Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 was narrow and focused on only one way of responding, namely the affective welfare response which showed feelings of security. In this case, it could cause families to be unable to show concern firmly through implementing regulations to guide children well. Third, there were no regulations on the use of gadgets in the form of time limits for using gadgets in controlling behavior in Families 1, 2, 3, and 4. This condition could cause the alpha generation children to use gadgets more by continuing to delay and argue when told to stop or when reminded by their parents. This means that communication that is not open and the absence of clear regulations regarding the use of gadgets could trigger gadget addiction in children.

Therefore, given the condition of dysfunctional family functioning, device addiction behavior in the alpha generation is difficult to prevent. Remember that the alpha generation is the digital generation and is most familiar with gadgets from a young age. This can be seen from the condition of gadget use by the alpha generation from Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 which shows the characteristics of gadget addiction (Engs, 1987; Goodman, 1990; Griffiths, 1996; Kwon et al., 2013). This can be seen from the alpha generation in Family 1 which showed characteristics such as disappointment and annoyance when asked to stop using devices (withdrawal); and the use of devices that could endanger oneself (laziness in



Volume 7, Issue January, 2024

studying). Likewise, the alpha generation in Family 2 showed characteristics such as withdrawal and obsession with gadgets, only thinking about using gadgets when not using them.

Likewise, the alpha generation in Family 3 showed characteristics such as loss of control and compulsiveness that might be continuous and difficult to stop when using gadgets; withdrawal, and use of devices that could harm oneself (lazy studying and insomnia). Meanwhile, the alpha generation in Family 4 also showed characteristics, namely withdrawal and use of devices that could harm themselves (laziness about studying). Apart from that, the intensity of device use from the alpha generation in Family 2 was also included in the addiction group with device use for more than 4 hours a day, namely 8-9 hours. This is following a survey that states that the average duration of device use by groups classified as addicted to devices is 26.3 hours per week or less than 4 hours a day (Lin et al., 2016).

In this case, the conditions for using alpha-generation devices indicate that children's welfare cannot be met based on Republic of Indonesia Law Number 4 of 1979 concerning Child Welfare. This can be seen from the aspect of children's basic rights to health which cannot be fulfilled physically and psychologically. Considering that children experience the characteristics of gadget addiction which leads to maladaptive behavior, namely insomnia, loss of control, obsession, withdrawal, and compulsion. Apart from that, it can be seen that the alpha generation, in using gadgets, does not have the right to guidance and protection of the environment which can be dangerous in the absence of regulations on the use of gadgets.

Therefore, efforts are made to increase family functioning in preventing device addiction behavior. As previously mentioned, three dimensions of family functioning were not functioning well and needed to be improved, namely the dimensions of communication, behavioral control, and affective responses related to device use regulations. In this case, efforts to increase family functioning in preventing device addiction behavior can be made by improving communication skills, increasing family behavioral control, and increasing affective responses in the family (Peterson & Green, 2009).

Families can improve communication skills among family members by; (1) communicating frequently, (2) communicating clearly and directly, (3) being an active listener, (4) communicating openly and honestly, (5) adjusting conversations in communicating with each family member, (6) pay attention non-verbal messages, and (7) happiness (Peterson & Green, 2009). In this case, families can communicate openly and directly by well-functioning communication conditions so that the alpha generation and their parents can interact frequently and express opinions freely and the use of gadgets by the alpha generation can be distracted.

Apart from that, families can increase behavioral control, namely setting rules for using devices by negotiating. Such negotiations should include; (1) family rules and standards that must be upheld, (2) giving rewards and consequences must be explained and understood clearly, especially in the alpha generation and (3) family members must agree to participate and commit to following these rules, especially in the alpha generation (Peterson & Green, 2009). In this case, the use of gadgets by the alpha generation can have a time limit with regulations on the use of these devices so that the use of gadgets by the alpha generation can be reduced and the alpha generation is less likely to be able to delay these regulations because these regulations have been approved by them beforehand.

Likewise, by increasing affective responses, families can do this by; (1) monitoring what is happening in the lives of other family members, (2) putting themselves in the position of other family members, (3) learning to control and express anger naturally, and (4) practice expressing welfare responses (Peterson & Green, 2009). In this case, the family members can also take part in placing themselves concerning the position of family members, including when family members are feeling sad.

Apart from that, families can learn to express anger naturally to convey feelings and emotions to family members regarding bad situations by showing a sense of openness to fellow family members. In this way, the family's affective response functions well, with family members able to show a variety of different responses, namely welfare responses and emergency responses in a balanced and open manner. In this case, the family can also show a natural sense of firmness and anger to strictly enforce the rules for using gadgets in the alpha generation.

Efforts to increase family functioning in preventing the use of these devices can be assisted by IFCC, namely by families carrying out various sub-activities in IFCC camps. In this case, sub-activities that can help families improve communication skills are cooking together and building tents. Families can interact and tell each other about their feelings and life experiences. In this way, all family members can get to know each other better and can communicate more openly. Apart from that, to increase behavioral control, families can take part in parenting seminars held during the IFCC camp. In this case, families can receive knowledge related to family development and tips on parenting patterns that are appropriate to the current generation, namely the alpha generation, including in making regulations for the use of gadgets. Likewise, by increasing affective responses, families can take part in fun game activities that contain traditional games. Through traditional games, families can build closeness with their respective family members.

Conclusion

The family functioning conditions of Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 can be said to be functioning well. This can be seen from the majority of dimensions of family functioning that function well, namely the dimensions of problem-solving, roles, affective involvement, and behavioral control. Likewise, with the communication dimension for Families 1, 3, and 4. However, there were several things in the functioning conditions of Families 1, 2, 3, and 4 that were not functioning well and needed to be improved, namely (1) the communication conditions between family members in Family 2 which was closed and indirect, and (2) there were no regulations on device use in the form of time limits on device use in controlling behavior in Families 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Given the condition of dysfunctional family functioning, gadget addiction behavior in the alpha generation was difficult to prevent. This could be seen from the condition of gadget use by the alpha generation from Families 1, 2, 3 and 4 which showed the characteristics of gadget addiction; (1) the alpha generation in Family 1 which showed characteristics such as disappointment and annoyance when asked to stop using devices (withdrawal); and use of devices that could endanger oneself (laziness in studying); (2) the alpha generation in Family 2 showed withdrawal characteristics, an obsession with gadgets with only thinking about using gadgets when not using them and was included in the addiction group with more than 4 hours a day, namely 8-9 hours; (3) the alpha generation in Family 3 which showed characteristics of loss of control and compulsiveness which was continuous and difficult to stop when using gadgets; withdrawal and use of devices that could harm oneself (lazy studying and insomnia); (4) the alpha generation in Family 4 showed withdrawal characteristics and uses gadgets that could harm themselves (lazy to study).

Given the condition of family functioning and the device used by the alpha generation, improving family functioning in preventing device addiction behavior can be done by enhancing communication skills, increasing control of family behavior, and increasing affective responses in the family. In this case, IFCC can help families carry out camps and various other sub-activities such as cooking together, parenting seminars, and fun games containing traditional games.

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Volume 7, Issue 1 January, 2024

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