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Parental Self-Awareness Management Towards Children with Gadget Addiction

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Abstract:
Prolonged gadget exposure significantly impairs children's emotional regulation and social adaptability. Such challenges underscore the critical role of early intervention in realigning developmental trajectories and equipping children with adaptive skills for managing frustration and interpersonal engagement. Effective parental self-awareness management entails deliberate strategies to regulate screen time while enriching children's environments with non-digital stimuli. The research aims to determine the management of parental self-awareness towards children who are addicted to gadgets. The research design is qualitative with a phenomenological method. Collecting data by interviews and observations. Based on the results of interviews with informants, four themes were obtained that explained the research problem. The themes obtained are based on parents' experiences managing self-awareness in children addicted to gadgets. The themes obtained are (1) the use of gadgets in everyday life, (2) characteristics of gadget dependence, (3) strategies to optimize gadget use, and (4) strategies to reduce gadget dependence. Management of parental self-awareness towards children addicted to gadgets, namely by supervising children when playing with gadgets, giving children time limits so they do not overdo it, and directing them to educational websites that children can use. For busy working parents, it is recommended that they still be able to control the intensity (duration and frequency) of gadget use by only giving them gadgets when parents are at home and controlling the activities (playing games or accessing the internet) children do with gadgets.

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INTRODUCTION

The pervasive integration of digital devices into daily life has reshaped childhood experiences, often leading to excessive screen time and associated behavioral challenges (Shafa et al., 2025). When children are asked to disengage from gadgets, immediate responses such as crying, sulking, or defiance are common, reflecting their emotional dependency on these devices (Adeni & Harahap, 2024). However, these reactions are typically transient; redirecting attention to alternative activities, such as play or snack time, often mitigates distress. This pattern underscores the urgency for parents to recognize gadget addiction as a behavioral and emotional regulatory issue, necessitating proactive management to foster healthier coping mechanisms in children (Firmansyah & Putri, 2024).

Gadget use frequently serves as a maladaptive coping strategy for children to alleviate stress or negative emotions, creating a cycle of dependency that complicates parental efforts to enforce boundaries (Sarkar et al., 2025). For instance, some children refuse essential activities, such as eating, unless gadgets are present, highlighting how screen time disrupts fundamental

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developmental routines (Yohana & Mulyono, 2021). Parents must interpret these behaviors as signals of emotional reliance, prompting the need for structured interventions. A balanced approach combining firm limits and engaging alternatives can reduce withdrawal-related distress while preventing long-term psychological impacts (Anjum et al., 2025).

Prolonged gadget exposure significantly impairs children's emotional regulation and social adaptability (Wraspati et al., 2024). Studies indicate that children who spend over an hour daily on screens exhibit heightened anxiety, aggression, and difficulty concentrating when devices are unavailable (Rashwan et al., 2023). Their inability to transition from virtual to real-world interactions often manifests as tantrums or withdrawal, signaling compromised emotional resilience. Such challenges highlight the crucial role of early intervention in reorienting developmental trajectories and equipping children with adaptive skills for managing frustration and fostering interpersonal engagement (Raj et al., 2024).

Parental attitudes toward gadget use are often paradoxical, driven by a desire to prepare children for a digital future while neglecting the consequences of overexposure (Hamid et al., 2023). Many parents rationalize unrestricted access, fearing technological illiteracy, yet simultaneously lament the reduced face-to-face interactions that occur during meals, play, or family gatherings (Nudin et al., 2024). This conflict perpetuates a cycle in which children prioritize screens over human connection, exacerbating traits such as selfishness and irritability. Addressing this duality requires parents to reconcile technological pragmatism with mindful oversight, prioritizing holistic development over passive digital immersion (George et al., 2023).

Effective parental self-awareness management entails deliberate strategies to regulate screen time while enriching children's environments with non-digital stimuli. Techniques include setting age-specific limits (no screens for children under 2, one hour for 3–5-year-olds), curating educational content, and introducing tactile or social activities as alternatives. Consistency is paramount; inconsistent enforcement exacerbates dependency as children learn to negotiate or resist boundaries. By integrating structured guidelines with creative engagement, parents can mitigate deprivation anxiety and foster intrinsic motivation for offline exploration (Olivieri, 2021).

Empirical observations reveal alarming trends: children increasingly prioritize gadgets over basic needs, with screen time during meals, learning sessions, and social events becoming the norm (Adeni & Harahap, 2024). This hyperconnectivity correlates with diminished concentration, sedentary lifestyles, and social passivity as children retreat into solitary digital experiences. Parents, overwhelmed by tantrums or resistance, often resort to using gadgets as pacifiers during busy schedules, inadvertently reinforcing addictive patterns. Breaking this cycle requires systemic change, starting with parental acknowledgment of the problem and a commitment to sustained behavioral adjustments (Patil, 2023).

The growing prevalence of gadget addiction among children presents a pressing public health concern with far-reaching implications for emotional, cognitive, and social development (Nikmah & Sari, 2024). Parental self-awareness emerges as a cornerstone in mitigating these risks, necessitating vigilance, adaptability, and a proactive approach to shaping children's digital habits (Rosdiana et al., 2025). Future research should explore culturally tailored interventions and scalable frameworks to support families in navigating the dual-edged influence of technology. Only through collaborative efforts—bridging parental education, policymaking, and community support—can society safeguard the developmental well-being of the next generation in an increasingly digitized world.

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METHOD

Research Design and Context

This study employs a qualitative methodology within a phenomenological framework to explore parental experiences and strategies for managing gadget addiction among preschool-aged children. The research was conducted in the Working Area of Betungan Health Center in Bengkulu City, Indonesia, during August 2024. This location was selected to capture insights from families in an urban setting where access to digital devices is prevalent. The study focuses on the lived experiences of parents as they navigate the challenges of regulating screen time and fostering healthier behavioral patterns in their children. By prioritizing phenomenology, the research emphasizes subjective perspectives to uncover deeper meanings behind parental decision-making and coping mechanisms.

Participant Selection and Data Collection

The study involved three parents of preschool-aged children, chosen through purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research objectives. These participants provided primary data reflecting diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and parenting approaches within the community. Data was collected via structured interviews to elicit detailed narratives about parental perceptions, challenges, and interventions related to gadget use. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy, with open-ended questions allowing participants to articulate their experiences freely. This method facilitated a nuanced understanding of how parents perceive gadget addiction, negotiate boundaries, and implement strategies to mitigate its impact on child development.

Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

Thematic analysis aligned with the phenomenological approach, emphasizing the interpretation of shared experiences and underlying patterns in parental responses. Transcribed interviews were systematically coded to identify recurring themes, including emotional dependency, resistance to gadget removal, and the role of alternative activities. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking and triangulation of findings across participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the Nursing Science Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu, ensuring adherence to the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Parents were assured anonymity, and their rights to withdraw from the study were emphasized. This rigorous, ethical, and analytical framework enhances the validity of the findings, providing actionable insights for parents to guide digital device use among young children.

RESULT

The Use of Gadgets in Daily Life

According to interviews with parents, two informants mentioned several activities that children engage in on gadgets, such as playing games and accessing social media applications available on these devices. This was expressed as follows:

> *"Sometimes my child uses the gadget to play games, and sometimes to open social media, like TikTok, for example. Even though he does not understand what he is watching, he often laughs at those videos."* (R1)

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Next, there is the opinion from the parent subject saying:

"Yes, playing games is fine, but I direct him to games that have educational elements, such as coloring games, matching games, games that have numbers and letters of the alphabet, and sometimes there are also cooking games" (R3)

One of the interview results from the parent subject regarding what can be accessed by children on gadgets is:

"For my child, the apps outside of games that he often uses are Instagram and YouTube Kids, mostly to watch Baby Shark" (R1)

Another opinion from the interview with a parent subject states:

"YouTube to watch and Playstore application because he already understands how to download games himself" (R3)

Characteristics of Gadget Dependency

When children stop playing with gadgets, they may experience withdrawal effects marked by changes in mood and behavior. This indicates the effects of gadget addiction on children, as seen from their reactions when asked to stop playing with gadgets. The interview results from the subjects regarding children's behavior state that:

"He does not cry when told to stop, but he will pout a little. When we tried to call him, he did not respond right away. After a while, he will respond. However, that is only for a little while. He does not do it anymore" (R1)

Another opinion from an interview with a parent says:

"He cries sometimes but is quickly diverted to other things, for example, if he is invited to the neighbor's house who has a small child, so they can play" (R2)

Strategy to Optimize Gadget Usage

The results of the interview regarding strategies to optimize gadget usage by regulating gadget usage for children, the subject said that:

"The use of gadgets is monitored because I am afraid that if he accesses gadgets or the internet without supervision, he will get involved in negative things on the internet" (R1)

Next, there is an opinion from an interview with a parent subject saying:

"His access to gadget usage is limited; we limit the usage time as well, and always provide appropriate applications" (R3)

Strategy to Reduce Gadget Dependence

Unrestricted use of gadgets can lead to gadget addiction, which impacts children's health. To avoid children's dependence on gadgets, parents can set limits according to a mutually agreed time with the child. An interview with a subject revealed:

"Usually, 2 hours, because if it is more than that, it is feared that something undesirable will happen. Sometimes, the phone is given while they are eating because if they are not given the phone, they will take a long time to finish their meal. So, whether you like it or not, the phone is given so that they can eat quickly." (R1)

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Another opinion from the interviews with parents said:

"About 1 to 2 hours, but a maximum of 2 hours to avoid being too long. But not all at once, for example, while eating" (R2)

The role of parents in addressing this is to provide accompaniment and supervision while the child is playing with gadgets. One interviewee stated:

"When my child is playing with gadgets, I always accompany him" (R1)

Another opinion from the parents interviewed was:

"If with his mother, he is often supervised; if with me, just occasionally" (R2)

Furthermore, there is an opinion from the interview where a parent stated:

"Sometimes he is accompanied but still monitored so he does not open things that he should not."

DISCUSSION

The Use of Gadgets in Daily Life

Based on interviews with the three parent subjects, children typically use gadgets to play games, watch videos, and apply filters on social media. Some applications that children can typically access include online games, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and the Play Store. Parents allow their children to use gadgets, but they still supervise to prevent negative impacts on the children and guide them towards educational features. Electronic devices can be accessed affordably and are crucial for children's educational development, allowing both the wealthy and those less fortunate to obtain them. As a result, there is no justification for parents who want to purchase gadgets specifically for their children, considering that the advanced nature of technology can facilitate children's engagement as active users of these devices. Nevertheless, children's use of gadgets can serve as educational tools, as exemplified by activities such as engaging with online games, consuming videos, and listening to music. The contemporary technological equipment commonly used by various demographics, including adults, teenagers, and the early childhood population, is referred to as gadgets. Gadgets are a fundamental necessity for individuals globally, as they offer innovative features that enhance information accessibility and streamline human activities online (Haryati & Haryanto, 2023).

Parents have various motivations for providing gadgets to their children, including facilitating sleep or mealtime, calming children during periods of distress, and giving parents free time for household responsibilities or relaxation. Most individuals believe that equipping children with gadgets simplifies parents' tasks, as it reduces the constant interruptions caused by children. Conversely, parents and educators argue that early exposure to gadgets familiarizes children with technology, expanding their cognitive horizons and knowledge base more rapidly (Handoko, 2024).

In practice, parents tend to allow their children excessive freedom regarding gadget use, which results in its dominance as a source of personal satisfaction for the children. A few parents supervise or enforce restrictions on their children's interaction with gadgets. Indeed, some parents provide their children with unrestricted access to gadgets without any supervision. Such practices often lead to negative consequences for the children. Despite parents' awareness of various harmful effects associated with gadget use, it is evident that gadgets have increasingly taken on a significant responsibility that parents traditionally held in raising their children. Many parents allow their children to engage in gadget use rather than actively participating in play activities due to their busyness or reluctance to engage (Sihombing et al., 2025).

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The tendency of children to develop gadget addiction can be linked to parental enthusiasm, combined with parents' frequent use of gadgets, which ultimately leaves children alone. Although this developmental phase is crucial for children, parents must ensure their children's healthy growth, free from disturbances that may arise from the negative implications of gadget use. Ideally, when children are allowed to engage with gadgets, parents should supervise all activities, such as providing educational videos and cognitive-enhancing games, including puzzles and Rubik's cubes, while blocking access to harmful websites. Additionally, children should not be allowed to use gadgets unsupervised. Furthermore, parents should actively engage their children in play activities to reduce the risk of addiction (Aryati et al., 2023).

Characteristics of Gadget Dependence

Based on findings from interviews conducted with three parent subjects regarding the attributes of gadget dependence, it is evident that children's responses when asked to stop using gadgets are manifested in significant behavioral changes, including crying and sulking. However, this negative emotional expression is temporary; once parents divert the child's attention to alternative activities, such as playing and offering snacks, the child's disposition shows a rapid improvement. Many children cry or show fussiness as a resistance mechanism against parental directions. Such behavior often serves as an outlet for expressing dissatisfaction and an intrinsic desire to prolong gadget engagement (Novalia & Kusayang, 2024).

After being asked to stop using gadgets, children may exhibit signs of anger, frustration, or even become aggressive and engage in rage. Children often use gadgets to relieve negative emotions or stress, thus displaying an emotional dependency on the devices; for instance, a child may refuse to eat unless a gadget is provided. Parents must recognize these indicators to mitigate the damaging effects of gadget addiction on the child's developmental trajectory. Parents should take a firm stance in regulating the duration of gadget use while simultaneously offering engaging alternative activities to ensure the child does not feel deprived after stopping gadget use. A gentle yet firm approach to setting time limits can facilitate a smoother adaptation process for children (Anwar & Buton, 2024).

Children's reactions when asked to stop using gadgets impact their emotional development. While some children may accept a rational explanation for stopping gadget use, many continue to show harmful reactions, such as anger or tears. This phenomenon indicates that gadget dependency can significantly hinder a child's ability to regulate their emotional responses. Children who engage with gadgets for more than one hour a day face the challenge of adapting to the absence of these devices. These children often experience anxiety and show difficulties in interpersonal communication when gadgets are not available. Children often exhibit anger and tantrums when instructed to stop using their gadgets. Research indicates that children accustomed to extensive gadget use are more prone to irritability and exhibit selfish tendencies, sometimes resorting to shouting or crying when their gadgets are taken away from them (Firmansyah et al., 2023).

Strategies to Optimize Gadget Usage

Based on interviews with three parents, strategies to optimize gadget usage among children include providing supervision. In contrast, children play with gadgets, setting time limits to prevent excessive use and directing children to educational sites that can be utilized. The research results indicate that children are not always supervised when using gadgets. Self-perception management that can be applied to children to mitigate the impacts of gadgets includes limiting the time children spend using gadgets, selecting age-appropriate and safe content, and balancing children's activities with gadget use (Zain et al., 2022).

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There are several ways that parents can monitor their children when playing with gadgets: (1) Limiting playtime. When children reach the pre-teen age, parents can give them more freedom. Starting from age five and above (6 to 12 years), they can spend more time socializing with gadgets. If parents practice the importance of discipline from an early age, pre-teen children will be able to use gadgets (social media) wisely. (2) Avoid dependence. Dependence and misuse of gadgets usually occur because parents do not supervise their use while the children are still small. Parents should provide rules to children without being authoritarian, but with a more nuanced understanding that is easier for children to digest and absorb. (3) Adapt to the changing times (Cahyani & Atmaja, 2021).

Parents play a crucial role in the development of children, preventing and addressing the negative impacts of information technology development, particularly gadgets (social media). Parents are responsible for providing a sense of security, developing social and cognitive attitudes in children, and, most importantly, providing education, especially moral education, from an early age. Parents are responsible and obligated to care for, protect, and nurture their children by the Law concerning Child Protection. The role of parents is greatly influenced by the busyness experienced by the parents themselves (Farras et al., 2025).

Parents' attitudes and behaviors will be imitated and exemplified by their children. There is even a saying that 'the fruit does not fall far from the tree,' which means that children's attitudes and behaviors often reflect those of their parents. Therefore, parents must be mindful of providing examples and understanding to their children. Children quickly imitate and learn from every interaction they have with others. Children at this age require more attention because they are unable to evaluate or discern what is good and what is not (Kurniawati & Sutharjana, 2023).

Another thing that parents can do is to invite their children to participate in positive activities, such as exercising together, gardening, or making crafts with readily available materials. Parents are expected to communicate more with their children, build communication and emotional bonds, ask about the problems they face, and make children feel valued and loved. Furthermore, parents strive to create an environment. Parents must be able to create an environment that encourages children to enjoy learning. The role of parents in supervising their children, especially when using gadgets, is vital. Therefore, parents must pay more attention to their children's development by providing time, engaging in discussions, and asking questions to facilitate their learning. This motivation can take the form of encouraging words to children, boosting their spirit and self-confidence (Azizah et al., 2021).

Strategy to Reduce Gadget Dependence

Based on interviews with three parents about managing children's time spent on gadgets with intervals of one to two hours, always accompanying the child directly and indirectly while using gadgets, and avoiding negative influences. Setting time limits and parental supervision during gadget use is essential. Without supervision, there are many negative impacts of playing with gadgets, such as mental health disturbances in children, delayed socialization, vision problems, decreased immunity in children, and gadget addiction. However, if children use gadgets properly, they can engage in many beneficial activities, such as watching educational videos, which can help them think more clearly (Haleem et al., 2021).

Parents are aware of the many negative impacts of gadgets. If children are allowed to use gadgets, parents need to control their behavior by providing educational videos and games that can sharpen their minds, such as puzzles, Rubik's cubes, and riddles. Dangerous sites should be removed or blocked so children cannot access them. Additionally, children should not be left alone

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while using electronic devices. Parents also need to invite their children to play together to prevent them from becoming addicted to gadgets (Samad & Haron, 2023).

Parents need to build communication with their children. When children are playing with gadgets, parents should teach them and show understanding in calm situations rather than chaotic ones. Invite children to communicate effectively with them and then provide clear rules in writing. These rules should include gadget usage time, for example, a maximum of one or two hours, playing with gadgets after studying, and specify on which days gadgets can be used, such as holidays, Sundays, or twice a week. When enforcing these rules, parents should also ensure that their children adhere to them, for example, by not allowing children to play with gadgets for long periods. Please provide a good example for the children by playing with them and spending time together. This way, children at home will not feel bored (Hidayati et al., 2022).

This is because they must follow schedules and rules as part of their responsibility towards their children. This indicates that most parents of KB Al Falah Darussalam Tropodo have limited excessive gadget use. How parents at KB Al Falah Darussalam Tropodo prevent their children from engaging in other activities, namely excessive gadget use, so that children forget about the gadgets they were playing with earlier. By establishing communication between parents and children, they can better understand why parents limit gadget playtime. Then, parents at KB Al Falah Darussalam Tropodo can help their children assist them with household chores. Please give them the understanding that they can. To encourage children's physical activity, parents at KB Al Falah Darussalam Tropodo provide light tasks that can be done while incorporating learning opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The management of parents' self-perception of children addicted to gadgets is done by supervising the children. At the same time, they play with gadgets, setting time limits to prevent excessive playing and directing children to educational websites available for them. Parents should still be able to control the intensity (duration and frequency) of gadget use by only giving their children gadgets when they are at home and by controlling the activities (such as playing games or accessing the internet) that children do with these gadgets.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest in this research. The research was conducted in accordance with established procedures, and official permission was obtained. Research is not related to the interests of other parties or anything else.

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