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Smartphones' Impacts on the Growth of the Youth: A Case Study of Nairobi Urban City, Kenya

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Abstract
Over-dependence on smart phones has been classified as having major negative impacts in the life of the youth. Mental diseases associated with smart phones in Nairobi are increasing rapidly. Therefore, this study investigates the negative impacts of smart phone usage among youths in Nairobi, prevalence of phone addiction and associated mental disorders. The researcher conducted an online survey among 500 youths in Nairobi city on the aforementioned negative impacts of smartphones. A web based literature review was carried out to analyze the negative hazards on the gadgets on youth.

Keywords: smart phone, over-dependence, ADHD, GAD, MPAS,

I. Introduction

The IBM Company has been credited as the inventor of the smartphone. This discovery dates way back to 1992. From those years, the smart phone has evolved from the normal communication gadget to personalized computer functions of personal organizer, and now the most recent AI functions. Two scholars trace the evolving shifts:

From 2007 to 2020, Smartphones have changed drastically. It is not just the product that has changed; smartphones also changed the entire world economically, culturally, socially. As a typical lifestyle was becoming integrated into smartphones, everyone started adding tons of other features. Now smartphones have up to 6 cameras, capable of taking DSLR level pictures, 6.5 inches screen, long battery life that lasts up to two days, fast charging technology that can charge a phone within 1 hour, wireless charging, wireless fast charging, extra storage that are super-fast, state of the art level processing power, FM radio, High Speed internet that is compatible with 5G(Campbell Kelley,2015) *Maps, GPS tracker, Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality Support and from Android to I-phones* (Bryne,2015).

The use of smartphones among young generation for over four decades has also become a global phenomenon (Campbell, 2005). The study was undertaken during the December and April holidays for the schooling youth. The study cut across residential and gated communities where the youth came from. The trend is what Firican calls the digital culture or digital technology impact on the youths in shaping the younger generational creativity (Firican, 2023). It also comes with negative impacts like brain diseases (Suhag, et al 2016) and depression (Wacks 2021).

Participants and Procedure

Participants were selected using purposive and random sampling techniques. The researcher selected the youth sample from Nairobi city in different wards and different residential areas as mentioned above. The participants were both from primary and high schools levels of education. Their ages ranged from 11-19 years with a mean age of 15.

II. Methodology

The researcher used existing instruments to measure addiction and stress levels among youth phone users. These were Smart Phone Addiction Scale, Mobile Phone Addiction Scale, Psychological Distress Scale, ADHD Rating Scale and Perceived Stress Scale.

III. Literature on Smart Phone Usage

The popularity of its usage has plummeted among youths (Lenord, 2015). The present study in Nairobi projected 96.2% of the sampled population had smart phones.

The excessive usage of smart phones with the youths especially during school holidays has increasingly become a pertinent issue. The sample revealed over 8 hours' usage per day for the youths under the current study in the upper side while 4 hours was on the lower side.

Negative Impacts' Results from Smart Phones

The major side effect of phone usage analyzed was over-dependence. This was assessed using Smartphone Overdependence Scale. The scale

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ranged from general to risk (10-40). 85.5% of the youth survey ranked above 31 on the scale. Over-dependence on the smart phone limits the youth cognitive functioning which leads automatically to mental addiction. Its attentive factors are salience, un-controlled phone use, and extreme dependency. Dabok Noh and Mi-So Shim in their study highlight several factors that influence over-dependence by youths on smart phones. They are age, gender, economic status of parents, anxiety, loneliness, and depressive symptoms. According to the study anxiety and loneliness were major predictors of phone over-dependence on smart phones. Noh (argues that:

Adolescents who were always or often lonely had an approximately 21% higher risk of smartphone overdependence than those who were sometimes lonely or not lonely.

Phone addiction also ranked high among smart phones using youths (Lenord, 2015). The predominant smart phone addiction has been discussed by several scholars. The other addictions prevalent are over-dependence, pornographic, gaming, networking, and fear of missing out (fomo). Out of the 500 youth surveyed, 402 ranked on point number 4 of the Mobile Phone Addiction Scale. The scale contains 17 questions and with 1-5 levels (1 is never, 5 always). The percentage translated to 80.4% of addiction.

Over use of phones also causes behavioral disorders. There was high prevalence of phone usage in gated communities than the residential homes. The prevalence was 89% and 11% respectively. Hooper and Zhou carried out thematic studies on these disorders and listed them as mandatory, compulsive, addictive, habitual, dependent and voluntary. Other disorders include somatization, bipolar and anxiety-depression ones. Anxiety was assessed using Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) tool. The tool provides scores as: 0–4 (minimal anxiety), 5–9 (mild anxiety), 10–14 (moderate anxiety), and 15–21 (severe anxiety) according to Ahn et al, (Ahn, 2019). 303 youths ranked under severe anxiety projecting 67.6% of the total. The moderate was 16.1 % mild anxiety was 11.9%, and the one minimal was 4.4%. The anxiety depression category showed logistical regression of 1.89 times higher than the rest of the categories. This finding was consistent with studies on depression and smart phone over-dependence (Ahn, 2019). The findings also revealed strong associations of psychiatric disorders with over-usage of smart phones among the youth.

Prolonged use of smart phones also caused other psychological impacts. From the Psychology Stress Scale (PSS-10) and Perceived Stress Scales, the results were: mode was 21 for PSS-10 and 24 for PSS. This implies that over 76% youths had high stress levels from phone usage. From the two Conner's scales mentioned, a key category was Attention Deficiency Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) disease. The youths who screened positive for ADHD in Nairobi were 66.2%. It has symptoms of hyper-activity, inattention, and impulsiveness. Studies depict the youths over-suing smart phones without optimal checks over time developed social problems and less inclined to white collar occupations (Joseph, 2019; Venkata, 2013). Faraone observes that ADHD on phones impacted the youths' school performance negatively (Faraone, 2003).

Mental health issues have also been discussed frequently in association with smart phones amongst youth. The major issues tackled by psychologists are anxiety, depression, sleep deficiency, eye disorder among others. Out of the youths studied, anxiety/depression ranked as the highest risk for them. It had 80.3%, while sleep deficiency was 12.1%, and eyes disorder was

7.6%. Over use of mobile phone led to increased depressive symptoms ($\beta = 0.208$, $p < 0.01$) and suicidal thoughts ($\beta = 0.125$, $p < 0.05$). The findings are consistent with earlier research on anxiety-depression related issues on smart phone over-usage (X Yang, 2019, J. Boumosleh, 2017, H.J. Seo 2018, Wacks 2021).

Contemporary Emerging Issues

A new hazard on the smart phones in the Nairobi context is sexting which involves sending and receiving of nude images and videos of the youths themselves. Yara et al (Yara, 2017) defines it the phenomenon as cyber-sex,

Moreover, technological advancements and the unrestricted, immediate, and seemingly secure nature of digital communication have been given rise to new ways of connecting with others romantically and sexually, and have facilitated the emergence of new behaviours including 'cybersex' and 'sexting'

According to Yara, sexting prevalence from different studies ranged as follows: Susanne Baumgartner et al 0.9 to 11.5%, Christopher D. Houck 22%, 17% sexual messages only and 5% sexual messages and photos, Kamil Kopecky 8.25% internet and 9.7% sending nudes, and Lippman 21% sending, 48% receiving and 2.3% forwarding.

This phenomenon has led to public exposure of nudes in cycles of cyber bullying in Nairobi.

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Michael Flood supports this view in his study asserts sexting impacts are public humiliation, damaged reputations, and social ostracization, especially for girls (Flood, 2003). The exposed and leaked nudes for the sampled youths were 41% of the total population.

Recent scholarship has also embarked on radioactive hazards. Miller studied the prevalence of brain cancers associated with over-use of phones (Miller, 2017). Arora on this same discussion notes prevalence of brain tumors and disturbed brain activity (Arora, 2018).

IV. Discussion

The study revealed that over-dependence, anxiety, and depression were the highest predictors of smart phone usage among the youths in Nairobi. The smart phone has thus become both coping and escapism mechanism for the youths that are in school holidays. Management of stress, depression must be introduced in the youth educational and church institutions to curb the problems. Referrals must be done for further psychiatric interventions.

Social interactions in Nairobi were limited due to most families living in gated communities and also parental restrictions. This factor led o most youths feeling isolated socially hence overdependence on smart phones. The youths need both psychological and behavioral therapies to cope with the negative impacts explored above. Dr. Lisa Damour suggests emotive therapy and parental monitoring of youths on the phone usage (Siler, 2023). This is due to the high rates of addiction compiled from the MPAS, ADHD, GAD scales.

From the 14 sub-groups in the youths investigated, 12 sub-groups are categorized under high risk of the negative impacts. This implies they are both chronic and pathological mobile phone users. From the COVID pandemic times to today, social isolation among schooling youth has tripled in Nairobi. This explains further the levels of suicide in Nairobi city.

The results also prove that age, gender, and socio-economic status influence mobile phone addiction in the city. Girls had higher over-dependence than boys in the study. Relevant interventions must be put in place at homes to save the girls under risk through Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT).

V. Conclusion

Excessive and over-dependence on smart phones has direct correlation with depression and psychological disorders among youth. While the phones are useful for youth entertainment, socializing, careers, and gaming, they are also sources of negative impacts. It is fundamental to address problematic and excessive usage of mobile phones for youths in holiday. Implementing phone filters and raising digital awareness are timely mitigation measures.

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