

Beware the dangers of gadget and Internet addiction

COVID-19 has minimised face-to-face communication, be it in groups or among each other. This is the reality and a "new normal". It has also intensified the digitalisation of businesses and services.

The digital platform has become increasingly significant in the teaching and learning process at school and education institutions, working from home and the selling and buying of necessities.

Since the pandemic started and even post-Covid-19, every individual lives seemingly with a gadget attached. This is the real virus that has spread and dominated our lives.

Apart from restaurants, the virus has spread into every corner of the world — in cities and villages, coffee shops, malls and even houses of worship.

Everyone is no longer talking with each other. Parents are now busy with WhatsApp, Facebook and the like while the young no longer crave their parents' attention as they already have their



**DR ZAFIR
KHAN
MOHAMED
MAKHBUL**

own gadgets in hand.

Such a situation is a cause for concern. Covid-19 has led to an increasing use of gadgets and the Internet among children and teenagers who are already among the most frequent users.

They would rather stay in their rooms, indulging in various social applications including WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, WeChat, Snapchat, Facebook Messenger, LINE and Instagram.

If they feel down, these are their companions.

If they are happy, the world would be the first to know about it. In short, it is their study, sleeping, eating and playing partner,

even becoming something akin to a personal counsellor.

Parents should know that an addiction to smart gadgets is bad for their children.

This can also create other health issues. Studies have shown that a high dependency on gadgets can lead to eye infection, such as red or watery eyes, deteriorating eyesight or worse issues like depression, fatigue, speech impediments and psychological problems.

Other than that, unmonitored Internet addiction among children and teenagers leaves them vulnerable to cyber crimes and destroys the family institution.

Studies have also revealed stress symptoms due to technological advancement.

According to Teenagers' Mental Health Report in Malaysia in the National Health and Morbidity Surveys (NHMS) 2017, teenagers experiencing stress had reached 9.6 per cent.

The conclusion of the report established that teenagers experiencing stress symptoms are

schooling in the city (10.3 per cent), female teenagers (10.3 per cent), Form 1 students (11 per cent) and those whose parents had separated (14.9 per cent).

Around 28.8 per cent exhibited symptoms of stress, including feeling alienated and anti-social tendencies for the past 12 months.

Stress symptoms will also lead to other unhealthy activities, like smoking (3.7 per cent), consuming alcohol (17.4 per cent), using marijuana (26.8 per cent) and involvement in sexual activities (17.2 per cent).

Other than that, the study showed that 19.1 per cent of stress symptoms among teenagers are mostly felt among bullying victims.

The 2017 NHMS statistics is very worrying especially on the influence of gadgets.

If it is not addressed now, it will destroy the younger generation's future.

At the same time, escaping from gadgets and technology is not the solution either.

This is because almost all

teaching and learning activities post-Covid-19 would require the use of gadgets.

In reality, the use of and dependency on technology has to be in line with one's own weakness and strengths, and comes with wisdom and knowledge. It can benefit through ongoing education.

Mental preparation and raised awareness must be present in every individual in facing the challenges of computing technology and automation.

Mental strength is crucial to one's emotional well-being and further to achieve prosperity and quality in life as hoped.

Gadgets can make people lose their sense of humanity, courtesy and respect.

If we really love our children, please do not let them continue to be addicted to their own virtual world.

The writer is a Professor and Deputy Dean at the Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia