

## Editorial

# Status Quo of Internet Addiction of Urban Left-behind Children in China

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Received: October 05, 2016; Accepted: October 10, 2016; Published: October 14, 2016

## Editorial

As a brand new lifestyle, the internet plays an eminent role in influencing people's mentality and behavior. No.37 *China Internet Network Development State Statistic Report* points out that adolescent group takes up 24.1% of the whole 688 million Chinese netizens (2016). The negative outcome of human-internet interaction-internet-addiction has thus become an increasingly severe social problem, grabbing widespread attention from the society. Internet-addiction refers to an uncontrollable online compulsion under no influence of addictive substances [1]. The cutting-off or decreased use of the internet may cause withdrawal reaction, accompanied with both physical and mental symptoms. In short, it is a gambling-like obsessive behavior [1]. In May, 2013, "internet-addition" was first officially included into *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V) [2].

Since China's Reform and Opening-up, large number of migrant workers from the less developed western region came to economically prosperous and more developed eastern region for work and left their children at hometown, bringing about a newly emerged unique adolescent group: the left-behind children. Originally, the term "left-behind children" specifically referred to those children left in the rural area, who were either under the care of their grandparents, relatives and neighbors, or in independent life. Gradually, their mental health problems emerged and became increasingly prominent [3-5].

In recent years, of all the left-behind children, the rate of urban children begins to increase. New data show that among 70 million Chinese left-behind children, there are 9 million living in the urban areas (2015). The "urban left-behind children" is defined as those children who are permanent urban residents under the age of 18 and have long been taken care of by nannies, grandparents, other relatives, or appointed non-relatives due to their both parents' or one parent's over half-year-long absence either for professional or academic reasons [6,7]. Generally speaking, this group of children is economically capable of accessing the internet. Without appropriate guidance on internet use, once attempted by complicated social environment, they easily fall victim to the internet, exhibiting deviation in personality and mental health. Currently, the incidence rate of internet-addiction in Chinese adolescents is between 6% and 14% [8].

## Status Quo

As the only municipality directly under the Central Government

in western China, Chongqing boasts 1.07 million left-behind children, comprising 34% of the total students at compulsory education stage in this region [9]. As for adolescents in Chongqing, China, the prevalence rate of internet addiction is 9.8% [10]. With *Adolescent Pathological Internet Use Scale* [11], 810 secondary school students were investigated, which were selected both in downtown Chongqing and its suburban towns and districts. Those selected students consisted of 401 male and 395 female students, 332 of whom were left-behind children; while the remaining 464 of whom were non-left-behind children. Related results were listed as below.

According to the questionnaire testing standard, of all the 332 urban left-behind children tested, 36 can be categorized as the internet-addicted, comprising 10.8% of the entire urban left-behind children tested, while the remaining 296 can be classified as the non-internet-addicted (the normal group), comprising 89.2% of the entire ones. The average score of the internet-addicted urban left-behind children group reached 3.44, while the average score of the normal urban left-behind children group was 2.00. Comparing to the previous research results, a great number of urban left-behind children were addicted to internet.

In terms of internet-addiction salience dimension (the use of internet as a decisive role in the customer's thinking and behavior) of the scale, the urban left-behind children were more likely to get addicted to the internet than non-left-behind children. Possible reasons are as follows: 1) the urban left-behind children try to seek a sense of security and belongingness they lacked in the absence of their parents by surfing the internet; 2) they suffer from the depression caused by inferiority, reticence, pessimism, unsociability etc. arising from the separation from their parents and want to get relief in internet games and other fantastic novelties on the internet [12,13]. Therefore, the urban left-behind children more frequently visit and stay longer at the internet than those who stay with their parents.

Gender difference did exist in the internet-addiction of urban left-behind children, with male addiction rate higher than that of female, which was in line with the previous research finding [14]. According to the questionnaire results, 298 belonged to the normal group; and 36 were internet-addicted, among whom 25 were male, with an addiction rate of 7.53%; and 11 were female, with an addiction rate of 3.31%. Generally speaking, in comparison with boys of the same age, girls are more mature and self-disciplined and pay more attention to information and knowledge provided by internet while many boys take internet as one of the necessities of life. In terms of disposition, boys are more likely to indulge in adventurous, exciting, novel and challenging things. And the games and sex-related information on line give them mental pleasure. Because of the anonymity of internet, boys are likely to relieve them from ill emotions by surfing internet. The major predictive variable of internet addiction lies in its function of releasing. The informative function is not the factor of the increase in internet addiction degree [8].

In conclusion among the Chinese urban left-behind children, their 10.8% internet-addiction rate reached high levels and that the internet-addiction rate of boys is higher than that of girls. In terms of the salience of internet addiction, urban left-behind children's occurrence rate is remarkably higher than that of those who stay with their parents.

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