Emotion Regulation Difficulties as a Mediator in Islamic Religious Coping for Problematic Internet Use

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Abstract

Secondary problems as a result of internet use are becoming common at young age. Research related to factors that influence internet problems continues to be carried out to develop internet problem strategies such as Islamic religious coping and emotion regulation difficulties. The purpose of this study is to identify the effect of Islamic religious coping on problematic internet use (PIU) with emotion regulation difficulties as a mediating variable. This study used a quantitative approach with 304 Muslim undergraduate students in Indonesia as respondents. The measuring instruments used were Iranian Religious Coping (IRCOPE), Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-18 (DERS-18), and Generalized Problematic Internet Use Scale 2 (GPIUS 2), which had been adapted into the Indonesian language. The results of the path analysis technique showed an effect of Islamic religious coping on emotion regulation difficulties and problematic internet use. However, there was no effect of Islamic religious coping on problematic internet use. This indicates that emotion regulation difficulties can fully mediate the correlation between Islamic religious coping and problematic internet use.

INTRODUCTION

During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, internet access was a alternative choice for classroom settings. The students are involved in online classes, webinars, and electronic seminars to improve their skills (Nagaur, 2020). Internet is also a tool for spreading knowledge and information about the COVID-19 pandemic globally regarding how to fight the COVID-19 pandemic (Kiraly et al., 2020). According to Singh et al. (2020), individuals' involvement in social media during the pandemic is a psychological need for them as human. This condition has increased internet usage during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research by Sun et al. (2020) found that there was an increase in the prevalence of severe internet addiction by 23% during the period of COVID-19. The study by Ilesanmi et al. (2021) indicates an increase of 64.3% adolescents using problematic internet during the COVID-19 lockdown. Interview results with two students also indicated that internet use had increased the duration of use by up to 12 hours/day during

COVID-19. This condition has another effect when they are not using the internet, sleep deprivation, and feelings of anxiety. According to Odaci and Kalkan (2010), a person who accesses the internet for more than 5 hours/day and feels uncomfortable when absent from it can be stated to be experiencing problematic internet usage (PIU).

Problematic internet use is a global issue defined as the lack of control over internet use that leads to adverse outcomes in people's life. Problematic internet use is described as excessive or obsessive aspects of internet use followed by preoccupation and the subsequent loss of control of internet use. In addition, this problematic internet use has consequences such as neglecting social life, relationships, healthcare, job or school assignments, and changing sleeping and eating habits, which will cause disadvantages to the individual due to excessive internet use (Spada, 2014). Problematic internet use has four dimensions: preference for online social interaction (POSI), mood regulation, lack of self-regulation, and negative impact (Caplan, 2010).

Previous research showed that internet activities are closely related to mental states and emotional signs (Gros et al., 2020). This is supported by Günaydın et al. (2021), whose findings showed that one of the factors that can influence problematic internet use is emotion regulation difficulties. Maladaptive emotion regulation is a factor that can sustain problematic internet use in individuals (Wartberg and Linderberg, 2020). Emotion regulation difficulties are deficiencies in the components of emotion regulation, such as individuals' understanding and acceptance of their emotions, the capacity to change emotions according to the purpose, and the capacity to control behavior based on their emotions. There are six dimensions of emotion regulation difficulties: nonacceptance of emotional responses, difficulties engaging in goal-directed, impulse control difficulties, lack of emotional awareness, limited access to emotion regulation strategies, and lack of emotional clarity (Gratz & Roemer, 2004).

Pettorruso et al. (2020) stated that someone with difficulty regulating emotions can become a possible risk factor in problematic internet use as a compensation strategy. According to Dolcos et al. (2021), religious coping is suggested for cognitive reappraisal in emotion regulation strategies to overcome difficulties. Francis et al. (2021) said religious coping refers to reliance on faith to navigate troubled waters. Aflakseir and Coleman (2011) have five dimensions of religious coping: religious practice, benevolent reappraisal, active religious coping, negative feelings toward God, and passive religious coping. Jong (2020) said that religious coping behaviors, such as prayer, are carried out to manage stressful and stressful situations.

Previous research showed that the effectiveness of behavior in religious coping can help a person manage individual feelings of distress and anxiety because it can overcome guilt, adhere to God's will or destiny, view suffering in a positive light, and help control individual fear (Chatard et al. 2020; Rosmarin & Leidl 2020; Vishkin & Tamir 2020). Rossi and Rossi (2017) reported that religious coping correlated negatively with emotion regulation difficulties, especially regarding lack of emotional clarity,

inability to accept negative emotions, and difficulty regulating emotions in general (Rossi & Rossi 2017). From the Islamic perspective, Islamic religious coping indicates an individual's connection with God and dependence on God for everything in life as coping for reducing anxiety and depression and restoring hope (Achour et al., 2017).

Achour et al. (2017) mentioned various religious coping techniques in Islam, such as believing in God, praying, remembering God (*dhikr*), patience, forgiving, resisting lust, positive thinking, and community support. Prayer acts as an effective psychological and emotional catalyst in filtering changes in decision-making and strengthening one's spiritual and emotional well-being (Achour et al., 2017). Shahabi et al. (2017) also said that religion is pivotal in reducing problems associated with emotion regulation difficulties. Religion is associated not only with emotion regulation difficulties but also with internet problems and can be considered a necessary strategy to prevent internet addiction. (Dossi et al., 2022).

Research by Naz and Sharma (2018) showed that Muslim who has a superior religious level is associated with low internet addiction score and has low motivation for using the internet, which is a compensatory strategy. Irman et al. (2019) proved that *dhikr* relaxation, an Islamic religious technique, is effectively used by school counselors with students to reduce problematic internet use. Relaxation of *dhikr* helps regulate emotions from internet addiction anxiety as a result of emotional changes that can strengthen the dangers of the internet. Vishkin (2014) said that believing God will not leave him as a manifestation of religious coping will calm individuals.

Tull and Aldao (2015) claimed that adaptive emotion regulation techniques can encourage accepting and understanding emotions and the situations in which they arise or increase self-efficacy to regulate emotions. This condition is different when a person has difficulty regulating their emotions; the pleasure gained from using the internet makes individuals repeatedly release negative emotions on the internet. This pleasure leads to tolerance of internet use from one to two hours onwards (Young & De Abreu, 2017). Based on the description above, researchers can assume that Islamic religious coping has a role in problematic internet use, with emotion regulation as a mediating variable. In addition, previous research showed a role of religious activity in problematic internet use, namely *dhikr* activity (Irman et al., 2019).

Islamic religious coping is likely to be an alternative support for individuals with internet problems through emotion regulation difficulties as a mediator or directly. Therefore, it is necessary to research the role of religious coping on problematic internet use, which is expected to be a reference for further research related to religious and problematic internet use. The purpose of the research is to identify the effect of Islamic religious coping on problematic internet use with emotion regulation difficulties as a mediator for university students in the COVID-19 pandemic.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive research design with a quantitative approach. The research model is the mediation analysis model. According to Hayes (2013), this mediation model is a causal system in which there is at least one independent variable (X) affecting the dependent variable (Y) through the intervening variable (M). In this study, the effect of Islamic religious coping (X) on problematic internet use (Y) with the role of emotion regulation difficulties as a mediator variable (M) will be tested.

Research respondents were selected by purposive sampling with the following criteria: Muslim, aged 17-29 years, undergoing online or remote lectures during the COVID-19 pandemic, and internet users. There were 304 research respondents, consisting of 100 males and 204 females. The study used an online questionnaire consisting of demographic data questionnaires and research instruments. Demographic data will be used as an additional analysis.

The data collection used three scales, namely Iranian Religious Coping (IRCOPE), compiled by Aflakseir and Coleman (2011) and adapted by Sure (2019). IRCOPE consists of 20 items with a reliability coefficient of 0.881. One of the items on IRCOPE is *"I seek comfort and guidance by reading the Al-Quran."* The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale-18 (DERS-18) was compiled by Victor and Klonsky (2016) and adapted by Faiz (2019). DERS-18 consists of 18 items with a reliability coefficient value of 0.900. One of the items in DERS-18 is *"When I get annoyed, I get out of control."* The last Generalized Problematic Internet Use Scale 2 (GPIUS-2) was compiled by Caplan (2010) and adapted by Ardiansyah (2018). GPIUS-2 consists of 15 items with a reliability coefficient of 0.850. One of the items in GPIUS-2 is *"I feel that online social interaction is more comfortable than in-person interaction."*

RESULTS

The data analysis results showed several demographic data, such as gender, age, duration of internet use, and respondents' health status.

Table 1

Demographic Data

Demographic	Description	N	%
Gender	Female	204	67.1%
	Male	100	32.9%
Age	17-20 y.o	215	70.7%
	21-23 y.o	77	25.4%
	24-26 y.o	12	4%
Duration of Internet Use	< 1 Hours/Day	2	0.7%
	1-4 Hours/Day	58	19.1%
	5-9 Hours/Day	91	29.9%
	10-15 Hours/Day	115	37.8%
	>15 Hours/Day	38	12.5%
Respondent's Health Status	Positive COVID-19	23	7.6%
	Negative COVID-19	281	92.4%
Living Region	Sumatera	55	18.1%

Demographic	Description	N	%
	Jawa	206	67.8%
	Kalimantan	19	6.3%
Living Region	Nusa Tenggara	5	1.6%
	Sulawesi	10	3.3%
	Papua	9	2.9%

The results of the data analysis in Table 1 represent the data for each category. The number of respondents in this study was 304 respondents, consisting of 204 females (67.1%) and100 males (32.9%). The age range of most respondents (215 respondents or 70.7%) were in the 17-20 years old, 77 respondents (25.4%) were in 21-23 years and 12 (4%) were in 24-26 years.

Then, the duration of internet use of most respondents (115 respondents or 37.8%) is between 10 to 15 hours/day, 91 respondents (29.9%) is between 5 to 9 hours/day, 58 respondents (29.9%) is between 1 to 4 hours/day, 38 people (12.5%) is more than 15 hours/day, and only two people (0.7%) who use internet duration less than 1 hour/day.

Based on health status, 281 respondents (92.4%) had a negative COVID-19 health, and 23 (7.6%) had positive COVID-19 health. In the context of area, 206 respondents (67.8%) were living in Java, 55 respondents (18.1%) were living in Sumatra, and 43 respondents (14.1%) were living in other regions outside Java and Sumatra.

Table 2
Empirical Score

Variable	Empirical Score			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Islamic Coping Religious	39	70	58.88	6.256
Emotion Regulation Difficulties	13	65	39.86	8.973
Problematic Internet Use	11	53	34.05	6.540

Table 3
Total Effect Score

	Direct		Indirect	
	IRC	ERD	IRC	ERD
ERD	-,124	,000	,000	,000
PIU	-,098	,324	-,040	,000

The empirical score in Table 3 showed that Islamic religious coping (IRC) with emotion regulation difficulties (EDR) has a more significant score indirect effect value (0.000). Then, Islamic religious coping has a more significant score of indirect effect value (-0.040) on problematic internet use. Emotion regulation difficulties had a higger score direct effect value on problematic internet use (0.324).
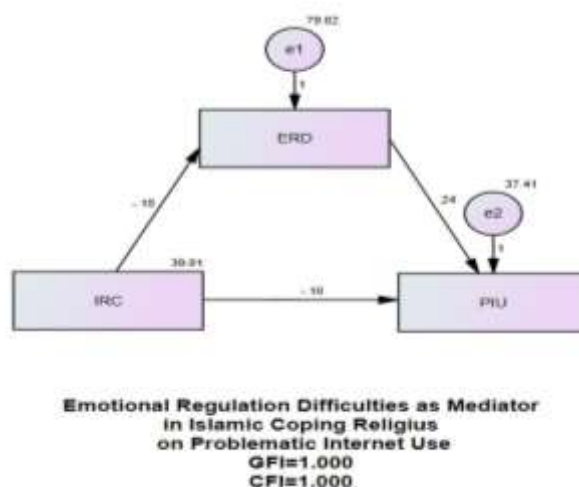
Figure 1

Path Analysis

Emotional Regulation Difficulties as Mediator
in Islamic Coping Religius
on Problematic Internet Use
GFI=1.000
CFI=1.000

Table 4

Regression Analysis

Variable	Regression Weights	Stand. Regression weights	Note
ERD ← ICR	.029	-.124	Accept
PIU ← ICR	.072	-.098	Reject
PIB ← ERD	***	.324	Accept

However, analysis in Figure 1 showed that the Goodness of Fit (GFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) value is 1,000 (> 0.90). It means the empirical model on Islamic religious coping, emotion regulation difficulties, and problematic internet use is appropriate with the theoretical model. In addition, Table 2 shows that Islamic religious coping affects emotion regulation difficulties with a value of $p = 0.029$ and $\beta = -0.124$. Then there is effect of the emotion regulation difficulties on problematic internet use with $p < 0.01$ ($p < 0.05$) and $\beta = 0.324$. Lastly, Islamic religious coping does not affect problematic internet use with $p = 0.072$ and $\beta = -0.098$.

DISCUSSION

The findings in this research showed that Islamic religious coping has influence on emotion regulation difficulties and emotion regulation difficulties influence problematic internet use, but there is no direct effect of Islamic religious coping on problematic internet use. There is no direct effect between Islamic religious coping and problematic internet use, so the role of emotion regulation difficulties is full as mediator on the influence of Islamic religious coping for problematic internet use.

These research results align with a study by Spada and Marino (2017) stating that when someone feels disturbed, maladaptive coping can trigger negative emotions, lead them to surf the internet to reduce negative emotions. Piri et al. (2020) also discovered

that emotion regulation difficulties contribute to problematic internet use in college students. However, it positively connects with maladaptive coping (Casale et al., 2016).

It discovered that the effect of Islamic religious coping on emotion regulation difficulties has a negative direction (β = -0.124). This means that the higher a person's Islamic religious coping is, the lower their emotion regulation difficulties is. Research by Semplonius, Good, and Willoughby (2014) found that the higher participation in religious activities predicted lower emotion regulation difficulties. Kraˇgeloh et al. (2012) remarked that religious individuals will rely on religion during stressful circumstances, which will correlate with active coping, taking positive meanings, and accepting the situation.

This research also found that emotion regulation difficulties positively affect problematic internet use (β = 0.324). This means that the higher the level of difficulty in emotion regulation owned by individuals, the higher the problematic use of the internet by individuals. However, the finding aligns with Amendola et al.'s (2018) research that emotion regulation difficulties positively affect problematic internet use, especially in difficulty receiving emotional responses, difficulty engaging in goal-directed behavior, difficulty in impulse control, and limited access to emotion regulation strategies. In addition, the relationship between these two variables can also be caused by the tangible benefits individuals receive from internet surfing behavior, such as changes in mood, pleasure, and tension and overcoming negative emotions. Wang and Qi (2017) state that difficulty in emotion regulation is a significant risk factor for addictive behavior.

Almenayes (2015) mentioned that a direct effect of religiosity on internet addiction is difficult to be generalized. This is because the correlation between religiosity and the internet is a complex and multidimensional empirical concern, so there are other apparent intrinsic factors between science and religion and different world views. Therefore, Charlton et al. (2013) asserted that religion may help reduce the vulnerability of internet problems, but the mediating effect of other factors makes this relationship significant. Research by Ekşi and Çiftçi (2017) found that there was no significant correlation between religious beliefs and problematic internet use.

The research found a positive correlation between the respondents' duration of internet use and problematic internet use. This indicates that the higher the duration of internet use, the higher the problematic internet use. According to Vigna-Taglianti et al. (2017), frequency of internet use, the number of hours connected to the internet, the sensation of feeling lonely, and visiting websites such as pornography correlates with an increased risk of PIU in both genders. This is supported by Morioka et al. (2016), who stated that excessive internet use of more than 5 hours/day correlates with problematic internet use in adolescents.

The female research respondents were 204, and 100 respondets were males. It means that woman were the dominate active internet users. Andangsari et al. (2017) found that women have higher scores on problematic internet use than men. Female students

use social media more frequently and possess greater emotional reactivity than males. Therefore, females have more opportunities for problematic internet use (Andangsari et al., 2017).

Based on a comparative analysis, the health status of respondents was shown. There was no difference in the average value of Islamic religious coping ($p = 0.927$) and problematic internet use ($p = 0.271$) among respondents with positive or negative status of COVID-19. However, there was a difference in emotion regulation difficulties, which has the health status of respondents who were positive and negative for COVID-19 ($p = 0.040$). According to Holmes et al. (2020), social isolation during the period of COVID-19 produced negative feelings in society, such as anxiety and stress. Cruz et al. (2020) said that good emotion regulation during COVID-19 was expected to minimize the risk of anxiety.

Vishkin et al. (2019) found that individuals with higher religiosity are more inclined to use emotion regulation strategies associated with adaptive emotional outputs and less likely to use those typically associated with less adaptive outputs. These findings indicate that individuals with higher religiosity can handle emotions more adaptively, thus making it difficult to regulate their emotions or maladaptive emotions. Wartberg and Lindenberg (2020) discovered that low levels of maladaptive emotion regulation techniques significantly predict a reduction in problematic internet use a year later.

This study found that Islamic religious coping affects problematic internet use with emotion regulation difficulties as its mediator during the COVID-19 pandemic. Fatima et al. (2022) showed that during COVID-19, positive religious coping facilitated positive emotion regulation to improve mental well-being in young adults, especially young men. Positive emotion regulation minimizes the occurrence of emotion regulation difficulties that are positively associated with internet addiction during COVID-19 (Pan et al., 2022). Mediation model analysis showed that difficulties in emotion regulation partially mediated the relationship between perceived mental health risks of COVID-19 and problematic internet use (Pan et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic is an extreme problem that significantly impacts individuals and society. Therefore, this phenomenon can affect the psychological condition of the subjects in this study. This study found that Islamic religious coping affected problematic internet use with emotion regulation difficulties as its mediator during the COVID-19 pandemic. Emotion regulation difficulties can perfectly mediate between Islamic religious coping and problematic internet use. Islamic religious coping has no direct influence on problematic internet use, so emotion regulation difficulties become a full mediator. This study implies that it can be a basis for considering religious strategies in preventing emotion regulation difficulties so that it helps in reducing problems of internet use.

Previous research on religious coping of other religious beliefs and emotion regulation has been widely conducted. However, research on Islamic religious coping and emotion regulation difficulties is limited, especially the relationship between Islamic religious coping and problematic internet use. This makes the research discussion not in-depth due to the limitation of references. Suggestions for future research are to develop the concept of religious coping and emotion regulation difficulties specifically within the scope of Islamic psychology and increase the proportion of respondents in the study.

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