

Girl starved to death while parents raised virtual child in online game

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Korean couple became obsessed with raising virtual baby while their real infant daughter lay abandoned and unfed

South Korean police have arrested a couple for starving their three-month-old daughter to death while they devoted hours to playing a computer game that involved raising a virtual character of a young girl.

The 41-year-old man and 25-year-old woman, who met through a chat website, reportedly left their infant unattended while they went to internet cafes. They only occasionally dropped by to feed her powdered milk.

"I am sorry for what I did and hope that my daughter does not suffer any more in heaven," the husband is quoted as saying on the [asiaone website](#).

According to the Yonhap news agency, South Korean police said the couple had become obsessed with raising a virtual girl called Anima in the popular role-playing game Prius Online. The game, similar to Second Life, allows players to create another existence for themselves in a virtual world, including getting a job, interacting with other users and earning an extra avatar to nurture once they reach a certain level.

"The couple seemed to have lost their will to live a normal life because they didn't have jobs and gave birth to a premature baby," Chung Jin-Won, a police officer, told Yonhap. "They indulged themselves in the online game of raising a virtual character so as to escape from reality, which led to the death of their real baby."

Last September after a 12-hour gaming-session the couple came home in the morning to find their daughter dead. The baby's malnourished body aroused police suspicions of neglect that were confirmed after an autopsy.

The couple fled to the wife's parents' house in Yangju, Gyeonggi province, but were picked up on Monday. The case has shocked [South Korea](#) and once again highlighted obsessive behaviour related to the internet.

A 22-year-old Korean man was charged last month with murdering his mother because she nagged him for spending too much time playing games. After killing her the man went to a nearby internet cafe and continued with his game, said officials. In 2005 a young man collapsed in an internet cafe in the city of Taegu after playing the game StarCraft almost continuously for 50 hours. He went into cardiac arrest and died at a local hospital.

Lee Joung-sun, an MP from the ruling Grand National party, last month submitted a bill restricting the hours offered to online gamers. Several bills are pending in the national assembly suggesting restrictions on teenagers' use of internet cafes and games.

[Research published last month](#) in the UK showed evidence of a link between excessive internet use and depression. Leeds University researchers, writing in the *Psychopathology* journal, said a small proportion of internet users were classed as internet addicts and that people in this group were more likely to be depressed than non-addicted users.

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