

Rising Concern: Gaming Addiction among Kids

*Dr. Kamini

Assistant Professor in Education, Sai College of Education, Jadla

Abstract

In recent years, the widespread popularity of video games has brought about a surge in concern surrounding gaming addiction, particularly among children. This paper explores the growing problem of gaming addiction among kids shedding light on the factors contributing to its rise and the potential consequences it bears. In an era where technology and entertainment are deeply integrated into daily life, understanding and addressing gaming addiction among kids has become a pressing public health matter, demanding collaborative efforts from healthcare professionals, educators, parents, and policymakers. This paper insights into the complexity of this issue, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and solutions surrounding gaming addiction among children.

Keywords: Gaming, addiction, kids

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*Author's Correspondence

 Dr. Kamini

 Assistant Professor in Education, Sai College of Education, Jadla.

 kaminiahuja1@gmail.com

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Introduction

Gaming addiction among children is defined as a compulsive and problematic pattern of too much gaming behaviour that considerably obstructs with a child's daily life, leading to deleterious consequences on their physical health, psychological well-being, and social interactions. Gaming, most entertaining and loving activity of kids, sometimes children may develop strong attachment to gaming, leading to addiction. Easy access to smart gadgets like mobiles, laptops, play stations, internet facilities, wider accessibility to online games, busy schedule of parents, peer pressure, perceived social status associated with gaming reinforcements and many other factors are responsible for increase in gaming addiction among kids.

Characteristics of Gaming Addicted Child

- uncontrollable urge to play video games,
- an increasing need for more gaming time,
- difficulty in reducing or stopping gaming activities despite the negative impact on various aspects of life.
- neglecting other activities or responsibilities

- withdrawal symptoms when not playing

The prevalence of gaming addiction among kids is a growing concern in modern times. Different stakeholders play an important role in recognising difference between normal gaming behaviour and gaming addiction among kids and providing suitable support and interventions for well-being and balanced development of children. Cheng and Li (2014) in a systematic review found that the prevalence of internet addiction among adolescents in China ranged from 2.8% to 17.3%, with an overall prevalence of approximately 6%. Müller et al. (2016) conducted a longitudinal study and recognized that higher levels of social anxiety forecast the development of internet and gaming addiction over time in adolescents.

Ferguson, Coulson and Barnett (2017) meta-analysed different studies of pathological gaming and reported an estimated prevalence of 3% comorbidity with mental health, academic and social problems for gaming addiction among kids.

The Times of India (2018) reported a startling rise in number of adolescents seeking counselling for internet addiction in Chandigarh. A study conducted by Sharma, Kaur and Sharma (2019) among college students in Punjab reported that approximately 15% of respondents were at risk of internet addiction. Kaur, Singh and Bhatia (2020) reported 7.2% prevalence of gaming addiction among school going children in Punjab in their cross sectional study. Rideout and Robb (2019) mentioned that lack of parental monitoring or understanding of gaming activities may increase the risk of addiction.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical base that applies to this topic is social cognitive theory, extension of Bandura social learning theory, 1977. This theory suggests development of particular behaviour by observational learning and imitation of others in the social environment. In this paper context, children grow into addictive gaming behaviour from their surroundings like family, friends, peers, siblings and media. Here, Bandura also emphasizes the role of cognition and self-efficacy in behaviour. According to this theory, kids’ perceptions of their own capability to control their gaming habits (self-efficacy) and their beliefs about the consequences of gaming (rewards and consequences) can influence their gaming behaviour and susceptibility to addiction.

Additional theoretical models for gaming addiction given by scholars are as follows:

1. *Self-Determination Theory:* Gaming addiction ascends when children's psychological necessities for independence, competency, and relatedness are unduly satisfied and achieved within the setup of the game (Deci & Ryan, 1985).
2. *Cognitive-Behavioral Model:* Cognitive biases, cognitive distortions and irrational thoughts related to gaming can acknowledge to the development and maintenance of gaming addiction among children (Griffiths, 2005).
3. *Escape Theory:* Children may use gaming as an escape and coping mechanism to deal with negative emotions and this give them a sense of accomplishment, leading to an increased risk of addiction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012).

According to social learning theory, factors that contribute for Gaming addiction among kids are as follows:

Factor	Explanation
<i>Observational Learning</i>	Addictive gaming behaviors of friends, elder siblings, relatives or other family members observed by children, results into developing curiosity and interest among kids and kids imitate them and become addicted.
<i>Reinforcement</i>	The rewards and positive experiences derived from gaming, such as in-game achievements, virtual social interactions, and feelings of competence, may reinforce addictive gaming behaviors in children and foster social belonging. The cycle of getting rewards make games more appealing and grows the possibility of addictive behaviour.
<i>Modeling</i>	The behaviour of parents or caregivers regarding their own gaming habits can influence children's perception of gaming as acceptable or problematic, potentially influencing their own gaming behaviour.
<i>Peer influence</i>	Peers play an important role in shaping gaming habits especially the chances of gaming addiction enhanced when gaming is prevalent and highly valued in peer group.

	Smahel, Blinka and Ledabyl (2008) mentioned peer pressure and social norms of gaming communities responsible for gaming addiction, as kids felt compelled to keep it up with their peers.
<i>Self-efficacy</i>	Children with higher levels of self-efficacy in regulating their gaming time and behaviors are more likely to exercise control over their gaming habits and avoid addiction.
<i>Media influence</i>	The advertisements and gaming influencers and media portrayal influences interest and perceptions about gaming among kids.

Consequences of Excessive Gaming

- *Physical Health:* Excessive screen time in playing games and continuous sitting for hours causes insomnia, restlessness, digestive disorders, sleep apnoea, musculoskeletal problems and obesity.
- *Social isolation:* Gaming addiction may result in social withdrawal, as they interact and engage in playing games with virtual friends more, leading to strained relationships and decreasing face –to- face interactions with family and peers (Wang et al, 2020). Similarly, Hindustan Times (2020) reported online addiction resulted into social isolation and children felt disconnected from their peers.
- *Financial Burden:* In severe cases, addicted persons prioritize online gaming activities over their responsibilities, leading to financial burden.
- *Mental Health:* Excessive gaming has a severe effect on mental health of children. Children get a sense of relatedness and self- sufficiency from gaming, hence overreliance on virtual experiences to meet their psychological needs leading to cognitive distortions associated with anxiety, impulsivity, depression and a decline in their academic performance. The Tribune (2019) published an article on the devastating impact of excessive gaming on academic performance of students.

Recommendations

- *Educational Programs:* Develop and implement educational programs in schools to raise awareness about the risks of gaming addiction among students, parents, and teachers. Educate children about responsible gaming, time management, and the importance of balancing digital activities with other offline interests.
- *Screen Time Management:* Encourage children to take breaks from gaming and engage in physical activities or other hobbies. Implement screen time guidelines, adhering to the recommendations from reputable health organizations.
- *Gaming Moderation Tools:* Gaming platforms and devices can provide moderation tools that allow parents to monitor and control their child's gaming time and content.
- *Identification and Early Intervention:* Train teachers and mental health professionals to recognize signs of gaming addiction and provide appropriate intervention strategies. Screen for gaming addiction in routine health check-ups and school assessments.
- *Alternative Activities:* Promote alternative activities that provide a sense of accomplishment, social interaction, and relaxation, such as sports, arts, and hobbies.
- *Strengthen Social Connections:* Encourage social interactions outside of gaming, such as participating in group activities or spending quality time with family and friends.
- *Professional Help:* Offer counselling and support services for children struggling with gaming addiction and their families.

The technological revolution has rapidly transformed the various aspects of daily life and bring a drastic change. By implementing these recommendations, we can foster a healthier gaming environment for children and minimize the negative impacts of gaming addiction on their well-being and development. Collaborative efforts from various stakeholders are essential in addressing this emerging public health issue effectively. After understanding about the impact of social learning and cognitive factors on gaming addiction among children, targeted interventions and educational programs should be developed by stakeholders to promote responsible gaming habits, enhance self-regulation skills, and create a balanced digital environment for children.

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