

Covid 19 Pandemic, Poor Emotion Regulation, and Gaming Addiction: Evidence from Two Case Studies

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ABSTRACT

Studies indicate that individuals grappling with gaming addiction frequently display symptoms reminiscent of those observed in substance addicts, including withdrawal symptoms, lack of control, and persistent usage despite adverse outcomes. This similarity underscores the need for targeted interventions and support for those affected. According to the American Psychiatric Association, the appeal of online games, particularly to children and adolescents, is noteworthy. The immersive and interactive nature of online gaming can make it particularly enticing to younger age groups, potentially leading to excessive use and negative consequences for mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened worries about excessive gaming and internet usage among adolescents and children. With lockdowns and restrictions in place, many individuals turned to online activities for entertainment and social interaction, leading to increased screen time and potentially detrimental effects on mental well-being. (Fernandes, Biswas, Mansukhani, Vallejo, & Essau, 2020). This research paper provides the two case studies of how pandemic contributed to excessive gaming behaviour and related emotional dysregulation.

Keywords: *Gaming addiction, emotion dysregulation, covid 19, Adolescents, intervention*

Emotion dysregulation is strongly associated with excessive gaming among adolescents. Adolescents involved in too much of gaming showed low emotional regulation. Covid 19 pandemic caused changes in adolescents' life as they were not able to go out or socialise with their friends, they were attending school online, which in turn had negative effects on mental health.

Gaming addicted adolescents exhibit symptoms of addiction, along with significant psychological impairment. An online assessment was given to assess demographic details, gaming addiction, psychological symptoms, life satisfaction, impulsivity, and self-esteem. Adolescents who fulfilled the criteria for gaming addiction has shown significant symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, lower life satisfaction, difficulty regulating emotions and attentional impulsivity. DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for gaming addiction appear to show meaningful cluster of symptoms that is marked impairments in psychosocial functioning. (Hormes, 2017)

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American psychiatric association and world health organization proposed to investigate the potential dysregulated online games. This research was done to understand the dysfunction associate with dysregulated gaming, which is prime in developing clinical interventions for the gaming addiction. Results were consistent with psychological needs theory, as three fundamental psychological requirements like influencing the regulation of game - competence, feeling effective in acting on the world and achieving desired outcomes: a feeling of autonomy and psychological freedom- relatedness, feeling connected to others. (Andrew k. Przybylski, 2019)

Ever since excessive gaming behaviour has been included in the 5th version of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders for further investigations, there's been an increased agreement that problematic and excessive gaming can be damaging to mental health, even then, efforts to tackle this fast-growing problem is limited. Angel Yee-Iam Li and team carried out a study titled Development and Validation of a Parent-Based Program for Preventing Gaming Disorder: The Game Over Intervention to bridge this gap. They developed a parent-based intervention program named Game Over Intervention (GOI) because of self- determination theory and the theory of ecological systems. The research was carried out on 163 parents (n=163) of upper primary school children; parents had to rate their child's symptoms of gaming disorder, exposure to violent games, and their gaming time at three different times- at the time of the study, after one week of intervention, and following three months of intervention. The results showed an overall reduction in all three areas assessed and the study demonstrates that the Game Over Intervention is an effective intervention strategy in treating some gaming disorder problems. (Yee-lam Li, Chau, & Cheng, 2019)

Ever since the outbreak of Covid-19 and the restrictions and lockdowns imposed globally, online gaming is the most favourite distraction and pastime for many people, especially children. Nevertheless, this recreational activity will have severe consequences- excessive gaming can lead to Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) and result in negative psychological issues. An experimental longitudinal study was undertaken by Julia Brailovskaia, et.al, on a German sample (n=271) to investigate and determine the impact of conscious abstinence from gaming. The participants were split into two groups- the experimental group (n=131) who did not engage in gaming for duration of two weeks and the control group (n = 140) that maintained limited gaming habits and time. Two variables- psychological wellbeing related and gaming related were evaluated through surveys conducted online at five different times- baseline, interim assessment, post-intervention, one-month follow-up, three-month follow-up. It was noted that the intervention showed a significant improvement in psychological well-being and also a decrease in daily stress, anxiety symptoms, gaming flow, gaming time and symptoms of IGD. These effects seemed to be stable over the course of three months. The study concludes that conscious abstinence from gaming is an effective measure in the clinical setting to treat IGD. (Brailovskaia, Meier-Faust, Schillack, & Margaf, 2022)

CASE REPORT 1

A 12-year-old male, student, hailing from nuclear family, presented with excessive internet gaming for last 1 year. He has no prior or family history of psychological problems or trauma. He is always preoccupied into gaming. The Gaming disorder scale- short form (IGDS9-SF) (Pontes et al., 2015) was utilised with current sample that is adolescent to determine excessive gaming. He fulfils the criteria defining gaming addiction on IGDS9. He

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gets anxious and irritable when stops gaming, can't regulate his emotions. There is aggression towards mother, in context to gaming behaviour which led to worsening of relationships. After he returns from school, he sticks to his gadgets as nobody is there to monitor at home, he doesn't have sense of time when gaming. Academic decline has started which the mother attributes to gaming, which led to school dropout. Mother mentioned he is a very bright student and excel in mathematics. He used gaming as an escape from negative mood. He became irritable when he could not play as being prevented from playing by the parents. He uses abusive language when playing, start throwing things and gets anxious when he loses the game. He started lying or stealing in context to gaming behaviour. He has given up all his hobbies like badminton and painting. He withdrew from his offline friends and made new friends online. He is in contemplation phase of motivation to quit gaming, there is no insight for his problem.

Scales were administered to assess child's baseline, after 3 months of intervention. The findings showed that following the intervention notable distinctions were observed in knowledge, attitude, self-regulation, and gaming addiction behavior. Whereas the score indicating gaming addiction, significantly decreased immediately and after 3 months program. Thus, it was evident that gaming intervention module is helpful to the participants with excessive gaming. The researcher took these sessions after pandemic where parents were hesitant to provide gadgets to adolescents, but due to pandemic there were online classes and homework, and other activities were online. It was difficult for the parents to manage the time adolescents were spending on gadgets. Parents also noted that they caught their children playing games during classes, some are watching porn and majority of them didn't attend the online classes. Therefore, intervention modules are applied for the adolescents with addiction and there was a notable difference after the intervention.

CASE REPORT 2

The second case is 14 years old young boy, who shares good relationship with parents and an elder sister. Parents have always provided him pleasant and protective environment. He was brought by his parents after pandemic, as he was getting easily upset when there was no internet connection or when his friends were unavailable for playing online games. He scored 7 out of 9 criteria's on IGDS9 scale. He started making excuses not to go to school, so that he could stay back home and play games. He was experiencing poor sleep and struggled in academics as he uses to always think of gaming. He started making different Ids in the games and collect rewards and coins, then sell them to his friends in exchange of money. He was aggressive and use to start shaking when stopped from gaming. He stopped going out and stopped playing cricket or do any recreational activities. His mother complaints were regarding his behaviour after pandemic: decreased interest in academics, social aloofness, always preoccupied with gaming, inability to stop playing, aggression towards family members, difficulty in sleeping, poor hygiene, irregular eating habits, headaches, and weight gain. As a result, he started having lack of confidence and inferiority complexes when meeting his friends and his social interaction became limited this in turn makes him feel sad and lonely.

During pandemic parents found out that child was not attending online sessions and playing games during school time. Parents complained that it was difficult for the parents to keep the child inside the closed doors or engaged in a productive activity. Therefore, during intervention program, scheduling helped the parents and children to set the time for activity and be busy in some activity or the other. Journaling also helped the children to monitor the

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difficult emotions, also helped them in advancing the recovery process. He was also taught mindfulness to calm him down and focus on productive activities. Maintaining social contact, physical activity like sports, proper nutrition, were emphasized for his well-being. Dr Manoj Sharma from Nimhan's has also researched that how psychological discomfort has been observed among internet users with gaming, therefore intensive intervention program is needed to manage internet gaming as well as other psychosocial dysfunctions. Family therapy was also given to parents to understand the management of gaming addiction. A strong sense of family support will help the child to recover and gain confidence. He showed reduction in gaming from 8 hours to one hour of using gadget and increase in spending time with family, socialising with friends, and engaging in leisure activities.

DISCUSSION

Children started playing games and started using gadgets after covid 19 pandemic as they were confined to home in turn this led to gaming addiction. Due to gaming addiction children are not able to regulate their emotions, like not able to manage their emotions, feels annoyed by small things, irritable, and loosing temper. Emotional dysregulation will disrupt the relationships, academics and maintaining friendships.

Numerous researchers remain uncertain about whether excessive online gaming stands alone as a distinct condition or serves as a symptom of underlying issues. In today's digital age, the lines between online and offline realms have become increasingly blurred. Almost every aspect of life, from social interactions to entertainment and even basic tasks like ordering food, depend on the internet. With the pervasive influence of digital technology, individuals can now engage in various activities from anywhere using smartphones, tablets, and other electronic devices. (Gregory, 2022)

Software sales have verified game play has been transferred from the real to the online world. Gaming is an innate human drive that begins in early childhood. The popular online games like simulation games and massively multiplayer online role- playing games are favoured by gaming communities. These games allow players to develop virtual alter ego, like avatars, availability of players from all over the world anytime and anywhere, they get fully immersed in reality that is fantastic and become the experience. As these online and offline games are appealing to children and adolescents, these groups are particularly at risk and more vulnerable for addiction. Research indicates that online gaming constitutes a behavioural addiction rather than a disorder of impulse control. (Griffiths D. J., 2012)

Withdrawal symptoms like irritable and feeling anxious when children are restricted to play games. Social impairment, emotional dysregulation, and aloofness from family and friends are seen in both cases. Both the cases started spending more time on gaming, as there was nobody to monitor and availability of gadgets which resulted in drop in academics, social isolation, irritable, social aloofness, still the continued gaming. Finally, they sought help as he was not able to stop playing on his own and struggled with anxiety and irritability. They came to the researcher for help where research asked them to make a schedule which will help them to monitor the activities, they were also given behavioural activities, teach mindfulness and CBT techniques to overcome gaming addiction. Additional targeted measures were implemented. by involving the parents like engaging in physical activity, nutritious food, maintaining social contact, adequate sleep, and monitoring children screen time.

CONCLUSION

These case studies are beneficial to heightened awareness about protective and risk factors in gaming addiction in terms of empirical findings in the present investigation gives credence to interventions to be planned to modify this type of addiction among adolescents as it is an alarming condition among adolescents. Future research on gaming addiction should prioritize clinical investigations into effective treatments and longitudinal studies to better understand the progression of the disorder. Although various diagnostic criteria for excessive gaming have been proposed, there is a notable lack of focus on prevention strategies for gaming addiction. Introducing preventive interventions and treatment options for gaming addiction is urgently needed. This study's scope could be expanded to encompass a larger and more representative population. Similar research could also be conducted among adults to provide a comprehensive understanding of excessive gaming across different age groups.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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