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Research Paper

The Predictive Role of Anxiety and Depression in Internet Gaming Addiction Severity Among Emerging Adults: A Cross-Sectional Study

Aishwarya Agicha[1]*, Dr. Nidhi Verma[2]

ABSTRACT

Background: Internet Gaming Addiction has become a major problem in young adults. This study has examined the correlation between Internet Gaming Addiction and psychopathological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation in individuals aged 18 to 30 years of age. **Objective**: To examine the associations between Internet Gaming Addiction severity and psychological characteristics (anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation), and to find the predictive value of anxiety and depression for Internet Gaming Addiction severity. **Methods**: The study employed correlational, cross-sectional design and used convenience sample of 500 respondents aged 18–30 years. Internet Gaming Addiction severity was assessed using the IGD-20 Scale, and anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation were measured using the Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI). Data were assessed using Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression. **Results**: Significant positive correlations were found between Internet Gaming Addiction and anxiety ($r = 0.46$), depression ($r = 0.54$), and suicidal ideation ($r = 0.48$), all $p < .01$. Multiple regression suggested that both anxiety and depression are significant predictors of Internet Gaming Addiction severity, explaining approximately 32% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.32$), with depression being the stronger predictor out of two. **Conclusion**: Higher Internet Gaming Addiction severity is associated with more anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. Findings suggest and support the need for mental health assessment, screening and early intervention within reported cases of gaming-focused treatment.

Keywords: *Internet Gaming Addiction, Anxiety, Depression, Suicidal Ideation, Young Adults, Mental Health Interventions, Addiction Severity, Psychological Distress*

Internet Gaming Addiction (IGA) has become a major concern in the digital era, especially among emerging adults between 18 and 30 years of age. The easier access to high-speed internet, combined with the convenience to play interactive online games, has caused a boom in gaming activity that has drawn many individuals into excessive play (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012). Internet Gaming Addiction is suggested to be an addiction involving uncontrollable urge to engage in online gaming at the expense of daily responsibilities, social life, and psychological comfort (Griffiths, 2005). Its high presence

[1]Ph.D. Scholar, Amity Institute of Behavioural and Allied Sciences, Amity University, Gurugram, Haryana.
[2]Professor, Amity Institute of Behavioural and Allied Sciences, Amity University, Gurugram, Haryana.
*Corresponding Author

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among young adults is concerning because this group is developmentally vulnerable to the effects of overuse, alongside ongoing identity formation and social pressures during this period (Ko et al., 2012). Internet Gaming Addiction is associated with an increased risk of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation and thus has become a matter of significant public health concern (Männikkö et al., 2020; Strittmatter et al., 2015). Such psychopathological correlates usually surface themselves through feelings of emotional distress and difficulty coping with normal life situations, along with feelings of loneliness, helplessness, hopelessness causing significant decline in mental health accompanied with compounded gaming sessions displacing real-world engagement and transactions (Lemmens et al., 2011).

Gaming Addiction

Internet Gaming Addiction has been widely studied to understand its consequences on mental health. Previous research has highlighted significant association between excessive gaming (in terms of time, type and duration) and a range of psychological problems that includes but is not limited to loneliness, frustration with usual life situations, and life dissatisfaction (Lemmens et al., 2011; Gentile et al., 2011).

There are certain features of gaming environment, especially MMORPG games, like social interaction, reward systems and continuous reward loops and stages with access to more features as one spends more time on gaming, along with escapism can cause dependence as it automatically requires and psychologically mandates a person to prioritize gaming over personal, academic and professional obligations (Charlton & Danforth, 2007).

This dependence further challenges the mental health capabilities and system that's already compromised and hence leads to mental health struggles creating a cyclical relationship between addiction and psychopathological distress (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012).

Anxiety, depression and Suicidal Ideation

Through several theoretical and statistical measures, the relationship between Internet Gaming Addiction and psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation has been widely studied. Cognitive theories suggest that gaming addiction is primarily related to cognitive distortions and compromised thought patterns that further increase psychopathological symptoms including but not limited to depression and anxiety (Elhai et al., 2017). Internet Gaming Addiction is also further associated with symptoms that incapacitates an individual to initiate, maintain and sustain new and already established relationships outside the virtual gaming environment. This problem further instills the feelings of lower self-esteem and heightened isolation linked with Internet Gaming Addiction in an individual and may even contribute to increased thoughts that are associated with suicidal ideation, especially for those who perceive their virtual identity as being more successful than their current and real-life circumstances (Lemmens et al., 2011; Strittmatter et al., 2015).

While the literature supports and documents an association between Internet Gaming Addiction and anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation, there are sufficient gaps that still require understanding of the long-term psycho-physiological and psycho-pathological impact of gaming addiction, especially during young adulthood. Currently, the existing research work heavily relies on short-term or cross-sectional data, leaving gaps that limit the understanding of psychological trajectory of individuals with Internet Gaming Addiction over significant time and duration (Mihara & Higuchi, 2017).

Additionally, the psychopathological profiles of young adults with Internet Gaming Addiction are currently not researched so well, this further limits the academic understanding of individuals and individual differences in terms of their personality traits, coping mechanisms and how such differences regulate or are related to socio-cultural and economic factors. These factors may further regulate addiction severity and have a significant impact on mental health (Brand et al., 2016). This study addresses these gaps by examining the correlational structure between Internet Gaming Addiction and some important psychopathological outcomes in a large sample of emerging adults.

Objectives

- To examine the associations between Internet Gaming Addiction severity and anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.
- To examine the predictive contribution of anxiety and depression to Internet Gaming Addiction severity.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between Internet Gaming Addiction (IGA) and anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation in young adults?
2. Is there a differential strength in the correlation between Internet Gaming Addiction and anxiety versus Internet Gaming Addiction and depression?
3. How do anxiety and depression contribute to variance in Internet Gaming Addiction severity?

Hypotheses

- **H1:** Internet Gaming Addiction will show significant positive correlations with anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation in young adults.
- **H2:** Anxiety and depression will show differential strengths of association with Internet Gaming Addiction
- **H3:** Anxiety and depression will significantly contribute to variance in Internet Gaming Addiction scores.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Participants and Sampling

The study employed young adults aged 18 – 30 years who self-reported experience with Internet Gaming Addiction (IGA). This age range was selected as they are considered especially vulnerable to Internet Gaming Addiction. A total of 500 participants (N = 500) were recruited using convenience sampling online through gaming communities and social media channels, and offline through local community centres and colleges. Eligible participants met the criterion of self-reported gaming engagement.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

A correlational, cross-sectional design was used to examine the associations between Internet Gaming Addiction severity and anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation at a single point in time. Because no variables were manipulated, the design supports conclusions about association and statistical prediction, but not about cause and effect.

Data were collected using a self-administered survey distributed both online and offline. The online survey was made available through links posted in gaming forums and on social media channels, offline surveys were distributed at local community centres and colleges.

Variables

- Independent Variable (predictors): Anxiety and Depression, as measured by the Personality Assessment Inventory ANX and DEP scales, also entered as predictors in the multiple regression model (Table 4).
- Dependent Variable (Outcome): Internet Gaming Addiction severity, as measured by IGD-20 test.

Measures

- **Internet Gaming Disorder 20 test (IGD-20 Test) – Pontes, Kiraly, Demetrovics, and Griffiths (2014):** This is a 20 item self-report measure assessing Internet Gaming Addiction across six components mapped into nine DSM-5 criteria (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The scale showed good internal consistency in its original validation (Pontes et al., 2014) and excellent internal consistency in the present sample (Cronbach's α = .89), and good criterion-related validity, evidenced by significant positive correlations with a week's gaming time, loneliness, aggression, along with confirmed factorial and construct validity. Items are rated on a 5-point scale, giving total scores from 20 to 100, with higher scores indicating greater severity. Pontes et al. (2014) proposed a score of 71 or above to identify disordered gamers. For descriptive purposes in this study, scores were grouped into researcher-defined severity bands: mild (20–49), moderate (50–70), and severe (71–100).
- **Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI). Morey (1991):** PAI is a 344-item self-report inventory comprising 22 non-overlapping scales across four major domains (Validity, Clinical, Treatment Consideration, Interpersonal). This study drew on three specific scales rather than a single combined "psychopathology" score: Anxiety (ANX, 24 items), Depression (DEP, 24 items), and Suicidal Ideation (SUI, 12 items). Raw scores are converted to T-scores (M = 50, SD = 10) quoted against a census-matched normative sample. Reported internal consistency is excellent for all three scales used here — ANX α = .91–.93, DEP α = .90–.91, SUI α = .84–.90 across normative and clinical samples and the PAI has well-established construct, convergent, and discriminant validity, replicated across clinical, forensic, and community populations. In the present sample, internal consistency was excellent for Anxiety (α = .92) and Depression (α = .91) and good for Suicidal Ideation (α = .87).

RESULT ANALYSIS

Data were analysed using SPSS 27. The results from descriptive statistics reported participant demographics and IGD-20 and PAI scores. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the strength and direction of relationships between Internet Gaming Addiction and anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. Multiple linear regression was used to evaluate the predictive nature and the contribution of anxiety and depression to Internet Gaming Addiction severity. A Steiger's z-test for dependent correlations was used to test whether the correlations of Internet Gaming Addiction with depression and with anxiety differed significantly (H2), and multicollinearity between the two predictors was checked using variance inflation factors (VIF).

Table 1 Demographic Variables

DEMOGRAPHICS (VARIABLES)	(N = 500)	PERCENTAGE
Gender (Male)	300	60%
Gender (Female)	200	40%
Age 18 to 20 years	280	56%
Age 21 to 25 years	120	24%
Age 26 to 30 years	100	20%
High School (10th–12th)	100	20%
Undergraduate- Bachelor's	250	50%
Postgraduate- Masters	150	30%
Gaming Addiction – Mild (IGD-20: 20–49)	130	26.0%
Gaming Addiction – Moderate (IGD-20: 50–70)	284	56.8%
Gaming Addiction – Severe (IGD-20: 71–100)	86	17.2%
Tech Use < 1 hr/day	40	8%
Tech Use 1–2 hrs/day	80	16%
Tech Use 2–4 hrs/day	120	24%
Tech Use 4–6 hrs/day	150	30%
Tech Use > 6 hrs/day	110	22%

Table 1 shows the demographic consistency of the sample (N = 500). The sample consisted of 60% male and 40% female. Most participants fell into the 18 to 20 age category (56%), followed by 21–25 years (24%) and 26–30 years (20%). Nearly half of the sample (50%) had completed undergraduate or bachelor's education, 30% held postgraduate or master's qualifications, and 20% had completed high school. Gaming addiction severity was distributed across mild (26.0%), moderate (56.8%), and severe (17.2%) categories, with most participants in the moderate range. Daily technology use was seemingly concentrated at 4 to 6 hours (30%) and 2 to 4 hours (24%), with only 8% reporting less than 1 hour of daily use.

Descriptive statistics

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for IGD-20 Total Score and PAI Anxiety, Depression, and Suicidal Ideation T-scores (N = 500)

Variables	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
IGD-20 total score	57.94	12.92	24	94	-0.03	-0.21
PAI Anxiety (ANX) T-score	59.48	10.22	34	88	0.00	-0.26
PAI Depression (DEP) T-score	61.70	11.24	33	92	0.07	-0.16
PAI Suicidal Ideation (SUI) T-score	55.80	10.72	30	89	0.02	-0.11

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the study variables. The mean IGD-20 total score was 57.94 (SD = 12.92; range 24–94), which falls within the moderate severity band, indicating moderate gaming addiction severity on average. The skewness (-0.03) and kurtosis (-0.21) values were close to zero, indicating an approximately symmetric distribution.

Mean PAI T-scores were 59.48 (SD = 10.22) for Anxiety, 61.70 (SD = 11.24) for Depression, and 55.80 (SD = 10.72) for Suicidal Ideation. On the PAI, T-scores of 60–69

are generally interpreted as mildly elevated and scores of 70 or above as clinically significant (Morey, 1991). The mean Depression score therefore lies just within the mildly elevated range, while mean Anxiety lies just below it, indicating that, on average, participants reported somewhat higher distress than the normative sample. All skewness (-0.03 to 0.07) and kurtosis (-0.26 to -0.11) values were well within ±1, indicating no meaningful departure from normality and supporting the use of parametric analyses.

Table 3 Correlation Analysis Between Internet Gaming Addiction and Psychological Variables

Variables	Internet Gaming Addiction	Anxiety	Depression	Suicidal Ideation
Internet Gaming Addiction	1.00	0.46**	0.54**	0.48**
Anxiety		1.00	0.62**	0.59**
Depression			1.00	0.55**
Suicidal Ideation				1.00

*Note: **p < .01 for all correlations.*

Table 3 shows Pearson correlations among Internet Gaming Addiction, anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. All relationships were statistically significant at $p < .01$. Internet Gaming Addiction was correlated moderately with anxiety ($r = 0.46$), showing that greater gaming addiction is associated with higher anxiety levels, however, the moderate size of the correlation suggests that other factors also contribute to the symptoms.

Since the sample size is significantly large (N=500), even a moderate relationship can appear to be statistically significant. Thus, the significance reported here is also related to large sample size and not only strong relationship between variables. The actual size of the correlation further suggests that gaming has real and meaningful relationship with psychological variable, but this link is partial in nature. This suggests the partial nature of their relationship rather than complete overlap.

As depicted all correlations in Table 3 were positive, meaning higher scores on one variable were consistently related to the higher scores on the other, also, no inverse relationships were seen among Internet Gaming Addiction, anxiety, depression, or suicidal ideation.

Internet Gaming Addiction showed a stronger positive correlation with depression ($r = 0.54$), suggesting depression may be a more central feature of severe Internet Gaming Addiction than being a core symptom of anxiety. Internet Gaming Addiction also correlated moderately and positively with suicidal ideation ($r = 0.48$).

These patterns help explain why gaming and mental health issues are correlated. For anxiety, gaming may work as an escape, it gives people some control over their environment that's stress free. But over time this leads to heightened anxiety. During the process, they keep themselves away from real world problem solving and their exposure to social support groups declines (Elhai et al., 2017; Kuss & Griffiths, 2012).

The stronger link to depression can be traced to the fact that people with low mood struggle to feel reward or motivation in everyday life, gaming provides them with the space to achieve those rewards and provides them with some motivation.

The link with suicidal ideation may come from the feelings of isolation and lower self-esteem that gaming can create. These are specific to times when people value their in-game achievements and identity more than their real life (Lemmens et al., 2011; Strittmatter et al., 2015).

Anxiety and depression were also strongly and positively correlated (r = 0.62), as were anxiety and suicidal ideation (r = 0.59) and depression and suicidal ideation (r = 0.55), suggesting substantial overlap within these psychological variables a pattern that's very relevant to interpreting the regression results below.

Thus, the uniformly positive correlations across all variables suggest that Internet Gaming Addiction does not work in isolation. It exists in a broader cluster of co-occurring psychological problems.

Table 4 Multiple Regression: Predictive Value of Anxiety and Depression on Internet Gaming Addiction Severity

Predictors	B (unstandardized)	β (standardized)	t	p
Constant	13.41	—	—	—
Anxiety (ANX)	0.243	0.19	4.06	< .001
Depression (DEP)	0.488	0.42	8.97	< .001

Model summary: $R^2 = 0.32$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.32$, $F(2, 497) = 116.1$, $p < .001$. Multicollinearity was not a concern (VIF = 1.63 for both predictors).

The results from the regression models are suggestive of the opinion that both anxiety and depression were significant and independent predictors of Internet Gaming Addiction severity with depression appearing to have stronger contribution (β = 0.42) relative to anxiety (β = 0.19). This is consistent with depression's relative zero-order correlation with Internet Gaming Addiction in Table 3. The two predictors together had their contribution to approximately 32 percent of the variance in Internet Gaming Addiction severity, marking the majority of variance related to or explained by factors outside this model. These are probably the factors that are inclusive of aspects related to social structure/environment, personality, environmental or biological that are currently not assessed here.

Given the strong correlation between anxiety and depression (r = 0.62), some shared variance is also expected and appear to be between the two predictors. On comparing the strength of association between Internet Gaming Addiction and each psychological variable assessed here, depression appeared to have stronger relationship (numerically) with Internet Gaming Addiction (r = 0.54) than that of anxiety (r = 0.46). Along with this, depression also emerged as the stronger unique predictor in the regression model. This pattern is highly suggestive of the fact that depression related symptoms like hopelessness, helplessness, emotional withdrawal, anhedonia may be more closely related to Internet Gaming Addiction severity than anxiety related symptoms, however, anxiety remained a statistically significant factor and should never be discounted in diagnostic and treatment formulation. A Steiger's z-test for dependent correlations confirmed that the correlation of Internet Gaming Addiction with depression was significantly stronger than its correlation with anxiety ($z = 2.69$, $p = .007$), supporting H2.

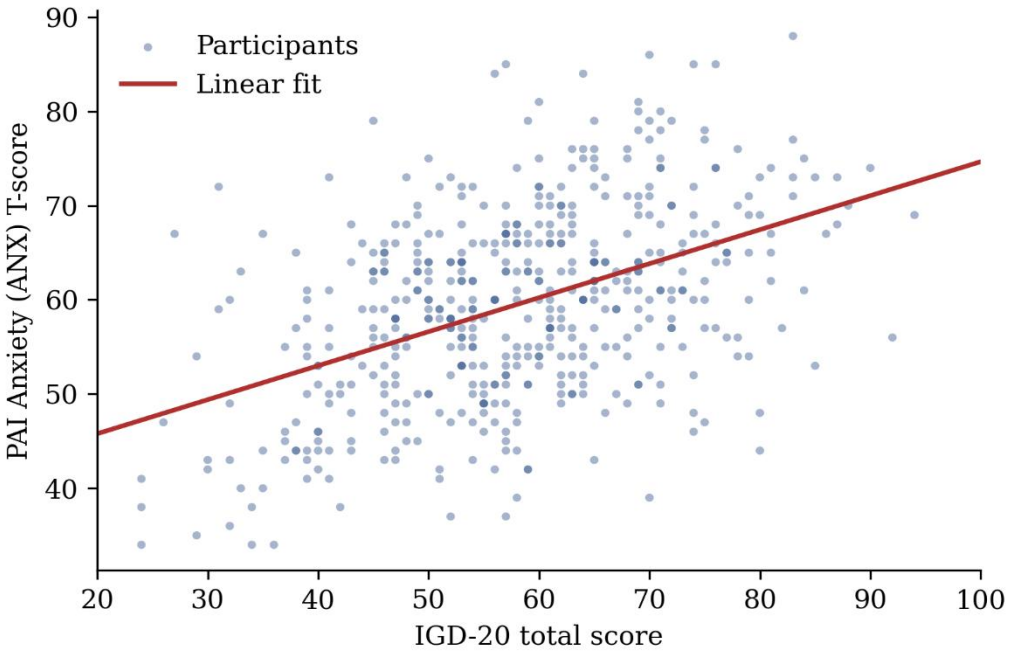


Figure 1. Scatterplot depicting the relationship between Internet Gaming Addiction severity and anxiety levels.

Figure 1 shows the positive relationship between Internet Gaming Addiction severity and anxiety symptoms. As Internet Gaming Addiction scores increase, anxiety scores seemingly increase. This pattern appears to be consistent with correlation that's reported in Table 3 (r = 0.46). One possible explanation is that gaming offers short-term escape from real-life stressors, which may maintain anxiety over time by reducing active problem-solving and access to social support.

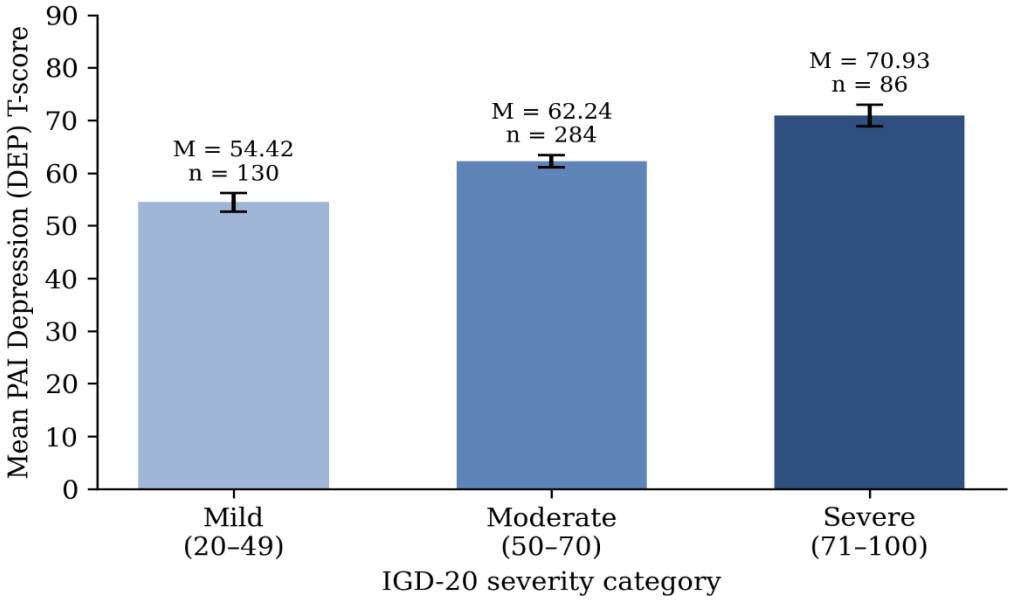


Figure 2. Mean depression (PAI DEP T-scores) by Internet Gaming Addiction severity category. Error bars show 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2 shows that mean depression scores increase with Internet Gaming Addiction severity, from mild to moderate to severe categories. This pattern is also correlated and consistent with positive Internet Gaming Addiction-Depression correlation in Table 3.

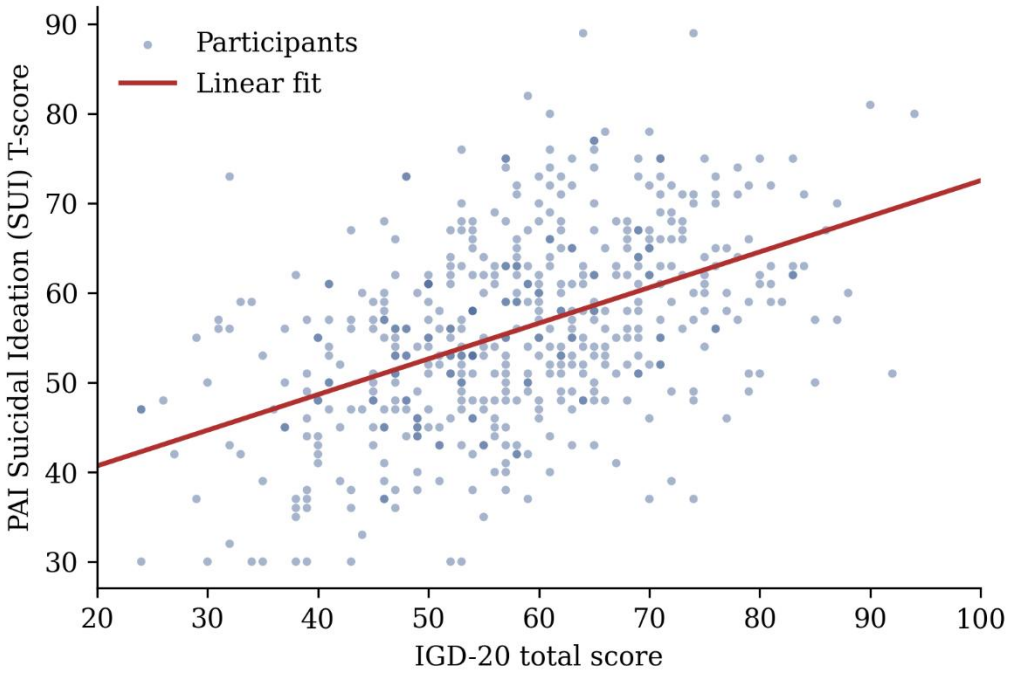


Figure 3. Scatterplot illustrating the correlation between Internet Gaming Addiction and suicidal ideation scores.

Figure 3 suggests a positive relationship between Internet Gaming Addiction severity and suicidal ideation scores. This pattern is also consistent and correlated with the correlation of Internet Gaming Addiction - Suicidal Ideation reported in Table 3 (r = 0.48). This suggests the significance of thorough mental health screening among individuals presenting with complaints severe gaming addiction.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study are in agreement with earlier research on problematic gaming and mental health. In a meta-analysis of 50 studies, Männikkö et al. (2020) found that problematic gaming was significantly related to depression, anxiety and other health problems, and earlier reviews have reported the same pattern (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Ko et al., 2012). The correlations in the present sample (r = 0.46 to 0.54) were moderate in size. This means that gaming addiction severity overlaps with psychological distress to a real but partial extent, and other factors are also likely to be involved.

Depression was the stronger predictor of gaming addiction severity in this study, and this also fits with longitudinal research. Gentile et al. (2011) followed more than 3,000 young people over two years and found that depression, anxiety and social phobia became worse after individuals developed pathological gaming. Lemmens et al. (2011), on the other hand, showed that loneliness and low self-esteem predicted later pathological gaming, and that loneliness also increased as a result of it. The relationship is therefore likely to work in both directions, which a cross-sectional study such as this one cannot separate. The I-PACE model (Brand et al., 2016) offers one way of understanding this. According to the model,

anxiety and depression act as personal vulnerability factors which, together with a person's coping style and beliefs about gaming, keep the problematic use going.

The positive association with suicidal ideation is also supported by earlier findings. In a large European study of adolescents, Strittmatter et al. (2015) found that those with pathological internet use, including gamers, had a higher risk of suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviour. For this reason, clinicians working with young adults who present with gaming problems should routinely screen for suicide risk.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, the use of convenience sampling, i.e., participants were recruited online through gaming communities and social media platforms and offline through community centres and colleges. Although it helped the researcher in participant accessibility but the generalizability of the results in broader young adult population received some limitation.

Second, the nature of the study is cross- sectional. This doesn't allow conclusions to be drawn about the cause and effect. It cannot be determined whether Internet Gaming Addiction precedes or follows anxiety and depression, or whether the relationship is bidirectional. This appears to be a major limitation.

Third, all data were self-reported, introducing potential response bias. This may have caused inflation of the observed correlations.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed the relationship between Internet Gaming Addiction and three major psychopathological domains of mental health, anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation among the young adults. Correlation analysis showed moderate to strong positive associations between Internet Gaming Addiction and anxiety ($r = 0.46$), depression ($r = 0.54$), and suicidal ideation ($r = 0.48$). This indicates that higher/severe levels of problematic gaming occur alongside with elevated psychological distress. Regression analysis suggested that both anxiety and depression significantly predicted Internet Gaming Addiction severity. The depression appeared to have the stronger unique contribution, together accounting for approximately 32% of the variance in Internet Gaming Addiction severity. These findings suggest the value of thorough mental health screening and appropriate diagnostic formulation, not the gaming behaviour alone in the assessment and treatment of individuals with problematic gaming.

Interventions targeting depression and anxiety specifically, such as CBT (Stevens et al., 2019), mindfulness-based approaches, and psychoeducation, may be valuable treatments for Internet Gaming Addiction.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed standard ethical procedures to protect participant rights and confidentiality. All participants were informed of the study's objectives and risks, provided informed consent. The participants were advised of their right to withdraw at any time. The anonymity of all the participants was maintained, and all personal information was kept confidential. All relevant ethical guidelines for research with human participants were followed throughout the study.

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Conflict of Interest
The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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