



Mental Health Correlates of Internet Gaming: A Comparative Study of College Students in Hyderabad, Telangana.

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ABSTRACT :

The surge in digital gaming has transformed the way young individuals engage with recreational media, raising concerns regarding its psychological effects. This study examines symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress in relation to the intensity of internet gaming among undergraduate and postgraduate students in Hyderabad, Telangana. A sample of 120 students (aged 18–35 years) was classified into four groups non-gamers, casual gamers, at-risk gamers, and addicts using the Internet Gaming Disorder Scale (IGDS). Psychological distress was assessed using the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21). Results showed significantly higher symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress among gaming addicts compared to casual gamers. Moreover, addicts spent substantially more time gaming during weekdays and weekends. The findings point toward a need for preventive mental health interventions addressing excessive gaming behavior among youth in urban India.

Keywords: : Internet Gaming Disorder, Psychological Distress, College Students, Hyderabad, Digital Addiction

1. Introduction

The rise of internet-based games has redefined the landscape of leisure activities among Indian youth, especially in metropolitan cities like Hyderabad. With the increasing accessibility of smartphones, high-speed internet, and immersive multiplayer games, digital gaming has evolved from a mere pastime to a potent behavioral engagement, occasionally leading to addiction. While many users maintain balanced gaming habits, some individuals experience disruptions in personal, academic, and emotional domains due to compulsive gaming behavior.

Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD), recognized in DSM-5 (APA, 2013) as a condition warranting further study, refers to persistent and recurrent engagement in online games, leading to significant psychological distress and functional impairment. Existing literature links IGD to emotional disturbances such as depression (Andreassen et al., 2016), anxiety (Sharma et al., 2020), and stress (Rajab et al., 2020).

Despite these associations, few empirical studies have investigated these mental health outcomes in the Indian urban context. This study attempts to bridge that gap by examining the severity of depression, anxiety, and stress among different categories of gamers in Hyderabad.

2. Review of Literature

Previous research has documented correlations between IGD and various psychopathologies. Wang et al. (2019) found that adolescent mobile game users often report elevated levels of depression and social anxiety. Similarly, Mentzoni et al. (2014) observed that Norwegian youth with IGD symptoms were more likely to exhibit anxiety and mood disorders.

The type and duration of gameplay also appear to influence psychological wellbeing. Eichenbaum et al. (2015) noted that first-person shooter and real-time strategy games tend to have higher addictive potential. Additionally, studies by Lemmens et al. (2015) emphasized the role of time spent gaming as a strong predictor of IGD severity.

In the Indian setting, Sharma et al. (2020) highlighted anxiety as a significant predictor of gaming addiction among young adults in Bengaluru. However, literature focusing on urban centers like Hyderabad remains sparse.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design and Participants

A cross-sectional, comparative design was employed. The study sample consisted of 120 college-going students (both male and female), aged between 18 and 35, from Hyderabad, Telangana. Participants were selected through simple random sampling from multiple universities.

3.2 Group Classification

Participants were divided into four groups (n=30 each):

- Non-gamers
- Casual gamers
- At-risk gamers
- Gaming addicts

The classification was based on scores from the Internet Gaming Disorder Scale (IGDS).

3.3 Tools Used

- Socio-demographic Proforma: Captured age, gender, education, family type, socio-economic status, etc.
- Internet Gaming Disorder Scale (IGDS): 9-item screening tool developed by Lemmens et al. (2015) to identify IGD.
- Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21): Developed by Lovibond & Lovibond (1995), this tool measures emotional distress under three subscales.

3.4 Procedure

After obtaining ethical clearance and informed consent, data were collected via offline and online surveys. Each participant was debriefed and assured confidentiality.

3.5 Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and post hoc Bonferroni tests were conducted using SPSS 20.0 to assess group differences.

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4. Results

Demographics:

All four groups were comparable in terms of age, gender, and socio-economic background. Most participants belonged to middle-class urban families.

Gaming Duration:

Gaming addicts spent significantly more hours gaming on both weekdays (Mean = 3.70 hrs) and weekends (Mean = 5.0 hrs) compared to other groups ($p < .05$).

Psychological Measures:

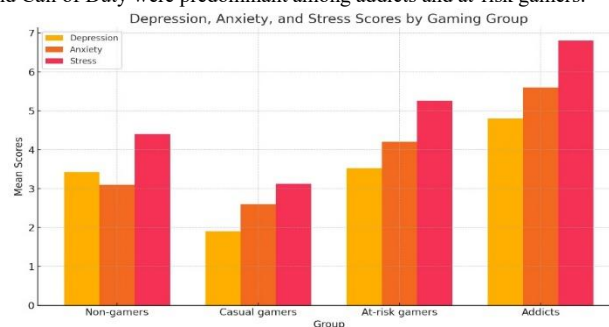
Depression: Gaming addicts scored significantly higher than casual gamers ($p = .019$).

Anxiety: Addicts also showed elevated anxiety levels ($p = .009$).

Stress: Addicts recorded the highest stress levels across all groups ($p = .003$).

Game Preferences:

Multiplayer battle games like PUBG and Call of Duty were predominant among addicts and at-risk gamers.



Its displaying the mean scores of Depression, Anxiety, and Stress across the four participant groups: Non-gamers, Casual gamers, At-risk gamers, and Addicts.

5. Discussion

The study corroborates global findings that excessive gaming correlates with elevated psychological distress. Individuals categorized as addicts displayed more symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress than their casual gamer counterparts. These findings resonate with those by Loton et al. (2015) and Liu et al. (2018), who identified gaming as both a symptom and coping mechanism for underlying distress. The immersive and competitive

nature of multiplayer games may reinforce addictive behaviors through intermittent rewards and social interaction. Gamers often use these platforms to escape real-world stressors, creating a feedback loop of avoidance and digital overuse (Billieux et al., 2015). In the local context of Hyderabad, where academic pressure, urban isolation, and tech access intersect, the psychological impact of gaming addiction merits targeted mental health interventions. Acknowledgements

6. Conclusion

This study emphasizes the psychological vulnerability of youth engaged in excessive internet gaming. As digital games continue to dominate leisure activity in urban India, awareness and preventive strategies must be developed to identify and support individuals at risk. Educational institutions, mental health professionals, and policymakers in Telangana should collaborate to integrate digital hygiene and emotional wellbeing into student life.

7. Limitations And Future Directions

The sample was limited to students from Hyderabad and may not generalize to rural populations.

A longitudinal approach could better determine causality.

Future research should consider comorbid factors such as sleep disturbance, academic burnout, and personality traits.

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