

World Health Organization declares Gaming addiction as a mental health disorder!

Triveni Mohan Nalawade* and Rachappa MM

Senior Lecturer, Oman Dental College, Muscat, Oman

*Corresponding Author: Triveni Mohan Nalawade, BDS, MDS, PhD, Senior Lecturer, Oman Dental College, Muscat, Oman, Fax No. - +9682466556; Email: triveni_nalawade@rediffmail.com

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Abstract

The objective of this article was to throw some light on the present scenario of increasing use of mobile phones, ipads, or PlayStation etc for the purpose of gaming and its adverse effects. It has been increasingly a concern amongst parents and many recent studies in South Korea, United Kingdom and United States of America have reflected the same. With World Health Organization (WHO) declaring it as a mental health disorder in its final draft of the 11th revision of International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) justifies a need of caution especially on part of parents as children and teenagers who might not be capable to seek help. The purpose of this move is to make health professionals, families or caretakers and health care workers to be alerted to the existence of this condition and make prevention possible.

Keywords: *Mental health; Addiction and Screen time*

Abbreviations: *WHO: World Health Organisation; ICD: International Classification of Diseases; and DSM: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*



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Introduction

Recently, I had been to a park and I saw mothers handing over cell phones to their young children to keep their children engaged and well-behaved! Children ranging from toddlers in strollers to preschoolers and teenagers were seated with cell phones playing on park benches. It is not a new sight and many of you might have observed it like me. Is this situation worth our concern and should we as parents be bothered about it?

Discussion

As parents we have always been worried about children getting used to sedentary lifestyle, lesser family and social time and constant fiddling with their gadgets. WHO declaration of gaming addiction to be listed as a mental health condition has a mixed reactions but WHO insists that it has taken this step so that timely help is available. Even other respected health bodies like the American Psychiatric Association has published gaming addiction as a “condition for further study” in its 5th edition of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

The Kaiser Family Foundation (US) during a national survey found that children aged 8–18 years had an daily average media usage time of 6 h and 21 min. Total media exposure time for most of the children exceeded the time spent in all other activities except sleep [1]. Although data from India are limited, a significant portion of children also has considerable TV viewing of greater than 2 hours per day [2].

A study conducted in the US, UK, Canada and Germany in 2017; a survey of 19000 gamers revealed that more than 65% participants did not self-report any symptoms of gaming disorder and only 2.4% participants had atleast five symptoms. Even WHO agrees that the percentage of gamers to be diagnosed with this condition is not more than 3% and the symptoms should be displayed for a minimum period of 12 months or lesser duration if severity is more [3].

International collaborative research on South Korean young adults/adults has identified 13.8% as the “Internet Gaming Disorder risk group.” Japan, China are facing similar issues and have already started taking measure like limiting hours of usage by children by reminders and making laws for access to gaming [4].

According to the American Psychiatric Association’s DSM-5, it identifies Internet Gaming Disorder as a formal “mental disorder,” stating “studies suggest that when these individuals are engrossed in Internet games, certain pathways in their brains are triggered in the same direct and intense way that a drug addict’s brain is affected by a particular substance [5].” Gaming prompts a neurological response that influences pleasure and reward feelings and when it becomes severe it manifests as addictive behaviour [6].

Evidence states that infants and toddlers face difficulty in transferring new learning from a two-dimensional representation to

a three-dimensional object (e.g., from screen to real life) [7] so children less than 2 years should have no screen time at all! Severe regular exposure to certain screen activities during important stages of neural development may have grave effects on gene expression resulting in structural, synaptic, and functional changes in the developing brain [8].

The media has a deep impact on the psychosocial development of children⁹ and we as parents are responsible to channelize this in a beneficial way. We need to minimize the amount of time spent with these gadgets in our children’s life, utilizing their positive attributes, and reducing their negative effects.¹⁰ The solution is simple, first the access, don’t pamper kids with gadgets as gifts. Our children need to be more involved in other activities mainly physical like playing so that they do not feel like using these gadgets to pass their time and kill boredom.

Conclusion

Technology touches day to day activities of our life and is a part of our daily chores. Its use in excess is definitely a concern and we as parents need to strike balance ourselves first. So let’s peep a little outside our whatsapp - Instagram and make some time for us as families and engage our kids in better ways like reading, outdoor activities and socializing with families. Its high-time we get out of our busy schedules and adapt to Bandura’s Social Learning theory to be Role Models for our younger generation. Let us stop innocuous looking games like ‘Pokemon GO’ and ‘Candy Crush’ from crushing our children’s childhood.

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