

Tackling Gaming Addiction in the UK

Aims

Given the scientific and clinical recognition of Gaming Addiction across the world, and its inclusion in the widely used diagnostic manuals, the aim of this report was to collate the recent scientific evidence base available for this mental health concern, and to outline possible policy options.

Key Findings

- Gaming Addiction is now included as *Gaming Disorder*, an official mental disorder in the World Health Organization's diagnostic manual (ICD-11), given the scientific evidence base accumulated over the past two decades.
- Gaming Disorder is a behavioural addiction similar to substance-related addictions, and criteria include salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict and relapse.
- Research indicates excessive gaming and especially gaming addiction are associated with many psychosocial and physical health problems.
- Physical health problems associated with gaming addiction include obesity and overweight. From a neurophysiological perspective, gaming addiction is associated with poorer response-inhibition and emotion regulation, impaired brain functioning and cognitive control, poorer working memory and decision-making, lower visual and auditory functioning, and a reward system deficiency, akin to that in substance addiction.
- Psychosocial problems associated with gaming addiction include co-occurring mental health problems, namely mood disorders, such as depression, anxiety disorders (especially social anxiety and social phobia), obsessive-compulsive disorder, personality disorders and other behavioural and substance-related addictions, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and psychosomatic symptoms.
- Risk factors for gaming addiction are neuroticism, aggression, hostility, avoidant and schizoid tendencies, loneliness and introversion, social inhibition, boredom inclination, sensation-seeking, diminished agreeableness, diminished self-control and narcissistic personality traits, low self-esteem, state and trait anxiety, and low emotional intelligence.
- Gaming addiction prevalence has been estimated to range between 0.7% in Norway to 9.3% in Lithuania, although no representative data are available in the UK.
- There is a collective responsibility to prevent gaming addiction from developing, to raise awareness of possible negative consequences, and to provide treatments for those who need them.
- A research and healthcare framework needs to be built which supports developing cost-efficient and targeted prevention strategies, aided by appropriate policy and regulatory frameworks. These should not take away from the pleasure gamers derive from healthy gaming, and pay attention to the individual gamer and the sociocultural context of gaming.

Policy Context

The UK Parliament's Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport inquired into how the addictive nature of some technologies can affect users' engagement with gaming and social media, particularly amongst younger people.

Methodology

Contemporary research evidence was collated by the Nottingham Trent University team, who have longstanding experience of researching gaming addiction globally.

Background

This report was written as a response to the inquiry of the UK Parliament's Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport into Immersive and Addictive Technologies.

Source

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