

Chapter-30: Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) and Social Disconnectedness

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Abstract

Gaming addiction, commonly known as Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD), is a behavioral addiction marked by intense and uncontrollable involvement in video games (overtheinternet), resulting in considerable disruption to daily functioning. Moderate gaming can offer stress relief, enjoyment, and even enhance visual-spatial skills and motor abilities (Granic et al., 2014), as well as improve mental health outcomes (Kowal et al., 2021). Nevertheless, contemporary trends indicate that the emphasis in online gaming has shifted from simple amusement to a potential risk factor (John et al., 2019). Excessive participation in online gaming can negatively affect physical well-being (musculoskeletal pain (e.g., wrist discomfort), mental well-being, and social well-being) and difficulties in interpersonal relationships (Lui et al., 2011; Jeong & Kim, 2011) and feelings of loneliness (Kamal & Wok, 2020; Li, 2023). One of its most profound consequences is social disconnection, loneliness, reduced real-world social interactions, impaired social skills, and strained relationships where individuals prioritize gaming over real-world relationships and social interactions resulting in reduced social activity (Yemima & Purnama, 2024), heightened social anxiety and feelings of loneliness (Niazi et al., 2024), social isolation (Fattah & Othman, 2022) leading to withdrawal from social interactions, strained relationships, and weakened family bonds (Chitra et al., 2023).

Keywords: *Gaming, Internet Gaming Addiction, Social Isolation*

Introduction

Internet Gaming Addiction

As defined by the WHO (World Health Organization, 2020), Gaming disorder classified in the ICD-11 (International Classification of Diseases-11th) is “a pattern of gaming behavior ('digital-gaming' or 'video-gaming') marked by inadequate control over gaming, a growing priority assigned to gaming over other activities to the degree that gaming supersedes other interests and daily responsibilities, and the continuation or intensification of gaming even

when negative consequences occur. For gaming disorder to be diagnosed, the behavioral pattern must be serious enough to lead to considerable challenges in personal, familial, social, educational, vocational, or other significant areas of functioning, and it typically has to be apparent for a minimum of 12 months”. Likewise, Mestre-Bach et al. (2023) defined Internet Gaming Disorder as “a continuous and repeated engagement in internet gaming, even in the face of physical or psychological harm”.

In recent years, with the easy accessibility of internet services and the popularity of internet gaming, the number of individuals with internet gaming disorder has increased manifold. In 2021, India reported a notable surge in online gamers, with approximately 390 million, an 8 increase from the prior year, and projections indicating it will surpass 450 million by 2023. Of these gamers, around 95 million participated in paid online gaming. Also, the global estimated occurrence of Internet gaming disorder among adolescents has been reported as nearly 8.8% (Gao et al., 2022).

While moderate gaming can offer stress relief, enjoyment, and even enhance visual-spatial skills and motor abilities (Granic et al., 2014). Similarly, certain online gaming applications have demonstrated success in improving mental health outcomes (Kowal et al., 2021) and fostering social connectedness (Bashir et al., 2024). However, current trends suggest that the focus of online gaming has transitioned from mere entertainment to a possible risk factor (John et al., 2019). Also, excessive participation in online gaming has been reported to have deleterious effects on physical health (musculoskeletal pain (e.g., wrist discomfort), mental health, and social health (difficulties in interpersonal relationships) (Lui et al., 2011; Jeong & Kim, 2011). In multiple studies, individuals with gaming addiction exhibit various physical symptoms like dry eye symptoms and pain (Byeon et al., 2022), chest pain, frequent headaches, and poor sleep quality (Ohayon & Roberts, 2021), that contribute to poor social functioning, mental distress, depression (Sitorus et al., 2020; Zabrina, 2023) along with increased psychological stress (Katz et al., 2015). It has also been noted that gamers frequently exhibit emotional and cognitive anomalies, resulting in withdrawal symptoms and declining life satisfaction (Zhang, 2023), psychotic tendencies, sleep disruptions, and difficulties in social adaptation, suggesting a harmful effect on overall mental health (De Pasquale et al., 2020). In a study, Morabito et al. (2021) discovered that people with Internet Gaming Disorder may use excessive gaming to cope with stress and escape from daily troubles, resulting in unhealthy eating habits, social disconnection, withdrawal symptoms, and mood alterations. Moreover, personality factors such as self-control, sensation seeking

(Mehroof & Griffiths, 2010), conscientiousness, neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience have been observed to serve a significant role in influencing addictive internet gaming (Cole & Hooley, 2013).

Internet Gaming Addiction and Social Disconnectedness

According to Lee et al. (2001), social connectedness is defined as “the subjective feelings of belongingness or closeness with others or various social groups, which can be used in intimate relationships such as those with family, friends, and peers, or broader connections to strangers and societal groups”.

With advancements in Internet technology, the concept of social connectedness has evolved; it now encompasses not only face-to-face interactions but also connections formed through online networks (Morris et al., 2014; Chen & Schulz, 2016). People who experience high levels of social connectedness tend to feel a strong bond with others, view them as friendly and accessible, and engage actively in social activities, integrating well into social groups (Lee & Robbins, 1995). Conversely, insufficient social connections can result in a range of adverse effects, such as behavioral or health challenges, resulting in depression and anxiety, increased aggression, and intensified feelings of isolation, along with physical symptoms (Rose et al., 2019). In the premises of internet gaming, those struggling with gaming addiction frequently experience symptoms of loneliness (Kamal & Wok, 2020; Li, 2023), social anxiety (Niazi et al., 2024), fatigue, and poor self-esteem (Archana et al., 2019).

Numerous studies have indicated that gaming addiction (IGA) is increasingly recognized as a contributor to social disconnectedness, mainly among adolescents and the young adult population. Findings suggest that disproportionate gaming leads to fewer social interactions and heightened feelings of isolation, as individuals often choose virtual interactions over real-life relationships, and social disengagement is associated with reduced social activity (Yemima & Purnama, 2024). Spending excessive time on social media platforms (over 4 hours daily) can adversely affect health, despite its connection to networked social interactions (Wheatley & Buglass, 2019). Additionally, heavy immersion in virtual gaming environments may lead to a decrease in genuine social connections (Faust & Prochaska, 2018), a restricted social circle, illustrating a reciprocal association between heightened Internet usage and a constricted social environment (Ohayon & Roberts, 2021). Another investigation focusing on PUBG gamers found that gaming addiction correlates with social isolation, indicating that excessive gaming can undermine significant social relationships (Nawaz et al., 2020). The evidence suggests that online gaming addiction considerably

detracts from an individual's social skills, leading to social disconnection. Increased gaming frequency is associated with reduced capabilities in communication, relationship cultivation, and conflict resolution, ultimately impacting real-world interactions. Also, online gaming poses a serious problem to a person's capacity to interact with the outside world through efficient communication, forming connections with others, settling routine disputes, and diminishing interpersonal communication outcomes, poor social interaction, decreased social engagement (Tras, 2019), social isolation (Fattah & Othman, 2022), social withdrawal, weakened family bonds which in turn exacerbates psychiatric illness like depression and anxiety (Chitra et al., 2023).

As indicated by the research, it can be deduced that excessive gaming on the Internet adversely affects a person's mental, social, and physical health. However, when used in moderation, online gaming can reduce stress, boost visual-spatial skills and motor functions, and even enhance mental well-being. In sum, it ultimately depends on the individual how he/she utilizes the gaming platforms, so that maximum benefits can be drawn from it.

Suggested Practical Strategies To Tackle Internet Gaming Addiction (IGA):

1. Monitor and Limit Gaming Duration

- Set a timer to restrict your daily gaming (for example, 1-2 hours). Gradually decrease this by 15-30 minutes each week.
- Allocate specific times for gaming (like 7-8 PM) to prevent impulsive gaming marathons.

2. Substitute Gaming with Other Activities

- Choose a new interest (such as reading, jogging, or painting) to occupy your gaming hours. Dedicate 30 minutes each day to this new endeavor.
- Participate in community clubs or groups (for instance, hiking or a book club) to foster social interactions.

3. Alter Your Surroundings

- Place gaming devices in less accessible locations (such as a closet).
- Implement parental control applications, like Screen Time (iOS) or Family Link (Android), to enforce daily limitations.

4. Address Triggers and Anxiety

- Engage in 5-10 minutes of mindfulness or deep breathing exercises each day to mitigate cravings.
- Tackle stress or boredom through physical activity (such as 20-minute walks) or journaling.

5. Create a Support Network

- Share your goal with a friend or family member for accountability and check in with them weekly.

6. Turn Real-Life Goals into a Game

- Establish small, attainable goals (for instance, complete one task each day) to mimic the rewards found in gaming.

7. Seek Professional Assistance if Necessary

- Reach out to a therapist for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) if gaming feels unmanageable.
- Search for local or online counselors who specialize in behavioral addictions.

8. Track Your Growth

- Keep a record of gaming hours compared to other productive activities each day (using a notebook or app).
- Celebrate achievements (for example, a week with reduced gaming) with a reward like a movie.

Chapter Highlights

- Moderate gaming can offer stress relief, enjoyment, and even enhance visual-spatial skills and motor abilities. Similarly, certain online gaming applications have demonstrated success in improving mental health outcomes.
- Excessive participation in online gaming can negatively affect physical well-being, mental well-being, and social well-being.
- Numerous studies have indicated that internet gaming addiction (IGA) is increasingly recognized as a contributor to social disconnectedness, mainly among adolescents and the young adult population. Findings suggest that disproportionate gaming leads to fewer social interactions and heightened feelings of isolation, as individuals often choose virtual interactions over real-life relationships. Social disengagement is associated with reduced social activity, poor social interaction, decreased social engagement, and social isolation.
- Practical strategies to tackle internet gaming addiction (IGA): (1) Monitor and Limit Gaming Duration (2) Substitute Gaming with Other Activities (3) Alter Your Surroundings (4) Address Triggers and Anxiety (5) Create a Support Network (6) Turn Real-Life Goals into a Game (7) Seek Professional Assistance if Necessary and (8) Track Your Growth.

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