What this research is about

Millions of people in France play video games. Among these users, research found that adolescents and young adults have the highest prevalence rates. Many young adolescents play without facing any problems, but for some it may become excessive. In these cases, some youth may develop gaming disorder (GD) or Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD). This is when they would show problematic video game usage, thereby showing an addiction.

When studies examine IGD, most researchers use the Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs). These role-playing games are full of interactions in the virtual world that can encourage addictive, problematic behaviours. However, the Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) video games have in recent years become the most popular format played worldwide. MOBA video games are built to be shorter and more competitive than MMORPGs. As no previous studies have investigated the differences between these two games, this study aims to fill in this research gap.

Past studies have examined the factors that may be associated with IGD. One such factor is alexithymia (a lack of emotional skills) perceived as a dysfunction in emotion regulation. Some studies found an association between gaming and dysfunctions in emotion regulation skills. This study aims to examine this factor further by comparing problematic and non-problematic gamers on alexithymia and see whether gender differences exist. The study also explore the potential differences between MOBA and MMORPGs gamers for the different variables investigated.

What you need to know

This study examined whether emotional dysregulation (alexithymia), among other factors (e.g., anxiety, depression, socio-demographic factors) may be associated with IGD. It also assessed for gender and game preference differences. The researchers recruited 429 younger adults from France via the Internet. Results revealed that IGD was associated with being alexithymic, as well as having higher depression and anxiety. Results differed by gender and by preference for Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) or Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs).

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited 429 young adults. The researchers uploaded an online survey that players could complete online. It included demographic questions about their age, gender, level of education, marital status, and employment status. To assess their video game preference, the researchers asked them which type of game they played the most (role-playing, simulation/strategy, action or adventure games). They also asked them which specific video game they preferred and played the most. Based on their responses, the researchers grouped participants into two groups of players: MMORPG and MOBA gamers.

To assess gaming disorder in adolescents, the researchers used the Game Addiction Scale (GAS), short version. Based on their responses, the researchers grouped them into two groups:
problematic gamers (PG) and non-problematic gamers (NPG).

To measure alexithymia, the researchers used the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20; French version). It had three dimensions: difficulty identifying feelings (F1); difficulty describing feelings (F2); and externally-oriented thinking (F3). Finally, to assess psychological distress, the researchers used the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS; French version).

What the researchers found
Results revealed that out of the overall sample, more than half (n = 273, 63.6%) were problematic gamers (PG). When the researchers compared them to non-problematic gamers (NPG), they found that PGs were more likely to be males, playing role-playing games, less likely to be in a relationship, and have higher depression, anxiety, and alexithymia scores. When they were compared on their game preferences (MMORPGs vs. MOBA), differences became more pronounced. PGs playing MOBA were more likely to have higher depression and less likely to describe their feelings. PGs playing MMORPGs were more likely to be single, have higher alexithymia, depression and anxiety.

Overall, factors that were associated with IGD included being a male, being alexithymic, and having high depression and anxiety. Results differed by gender and game preference. In males, being alexithymic, being younger, and having high anxiety and depression scores increased the risk of IGD. In females, having lower education and depression predicted IGD. In MOBA players, having difficulty describing feelings predicted IGD. In MMORPG players, having graduated from high school, and having anxiety predicted IGD.

How you can use this research
This research could be used by treatment and prevention service providers. Clinical interventions and prevention programs could target clients with emotional regulation dysfunctions. Prevention programs could teach players about IGD and the signs and symptoms for an addiction. Treatments could target alternative methods for emotion regulation. They could also include emotion-focused therapy and family therapy. Future research could examine emotion regulation and alexithymia in older gamers. Future studies could compare younger versus older adults.

About the researchers
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Citation

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)
Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in responsible gambling policies, standards and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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