

# research snapshot

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## Investigating physical and mental health problems associated with gaming disorder

### What this research is about

Playing video game is a popular leisure activity, especially among young people. However, excessive gaming can lead to poorer health and well-being. At the same time, people may play video games as a way to cope with stress, and physical and mental health issues. The World Health Organization (WHO) lists gaming disorder as a mental health condition in the 11<sup>th</sup> revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). People with gaming disorder find it difficult to control their gaming behaviour despite the negative consequences in their life.

Understanding the risk factors of gaming disorder can help in the development of prevention and treatment strategies. The aim of this study was to examine factors related to physical health, mental health, and psychological well-being that might predict gaming disorder. Psychological well-being refers to how people judge their health and quality of life. This study also examined if psychological well-being might help explain the link between physical health problems and gaming disorder. Another aim was to examine if distress tolerance might help protect people with poorer well-being from gaming disorder. Distress tolerance is a person's ability to deal with negative emotional states in a healthy way.

### What the researchers did

The researchers recruited participants through social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Reddit, and Instagram) and Prolific. Prolific is an online platform for survey and market research. Participants had to be at least 18 years old, live in Australia, and speak English fluently. Their survey data were collected between June and September, 2020.

### What you need to know

Gaming disorder occurs when people find it difficult to control how much time they spend playing video games. Gaming disorder can lead to many negative consequences, including poorer health and well-being. Understanding its risk factors can help in the development of prevention and treatment plans. The aim of this study was to examine factors related to physical health, mental health and psychological well-being that might predict gaming disorder. Another aim was to examine the roles of psychological well-being and distress tolerance in the link between physical health problems and gaming disorder.

The researchers surveyed 474 Australian adults. They found that age, attention problems, and physical health problems were associated with gaming disorder. Younger people had more symptoms of gaming disorder than older people. People with attention problems and physical health problems also reported more symptoms of gaming disorder. In addition, people with worse physical health problems had poorer psychological well-being. However, psychological well-being did not predict gaming disorder. Distress tolerance also did not help protect people with poorer well-being from gaming disorder.

Participants completed an online survey that asked about their sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender) and gaming behaviour. The Gaming Disorder Test (GDT) was used to assess symptoms of gaming disorder according to the ICD-11. Physical health problems and psychological well-being were

assessed with items from the PROMIS Global Health scale (v 1.20). Participants were also asked about mental health problems including loneliness, attention problems, depression, and anxiety. In addition, they completed the distress tolerance scale-short form (DTS-SF).

A total of 515 participants completed the survey. However, 41 participants failed at least one attention check question. Data from the remaining 474 participants were analyzed for this study. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 66 years. The average age was 29 years. Almost half of the participants were female (47%).

### What the researchers found

The researchers first examined which factors might predict gaming disorder. They found that only age, attention problems, and physical health problems were associated with gaming disorder. Younger people had more symptoms of gaming disorder than older people. Those with attention problems and those with physical health problems also had more symptoms of gaming disorder. In particular, having physical health problems was most strongly associated with gaming disorder.

The researchers then examined the roles of psychological well-being and distress tolerance in the link between physical health problems and gaming disorder. They found that participants with worse physical health problems had poorer psychological well-being. However, psychological well-being did not predict gaming disorder. Thus, psychological well-being did not help explain the link between physical health problems and gaming disorder. Also, distress tolerance did not appear to help protect people with poorer well-being from gaming disorder.

### How you can use this research

The findings of this study can inform research as well as prevention and treatment strategies for gaming disorder. The researchers suggested that health practitioners screen for gaming disorder alongside other health factors. Prevention strategies could target people at risk of gaming disorder, such as people with attention problems. The gaming industry

also has a responsibility in the prevention of gaming disorder. More research is needed on the relationship between physical health problems and gaming disorder. For example, which specific physical health problems might increase the risk of gaming disorder?

### About the researchers

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