

Gaming: Prevalence & Trends

Youth & Digital Technology: Growing Up Online Toolkit

In this document, service providers will find some key statistics and trends on problematic gaming.

The first video games were developed as technological wonders; simple in design and intended for entertainment. Early iterations focused on moving objects from one area to another. However, modern games are intentionally designed to stimulate the brain's pleasure centers, encouraging prolonged and frequent play [1]. The gaming industry continues to expand and diversify its products with innovations including the expansion of gaming genres, accessibility, and playability. Two recent phenomena are e-sports and live streaming video game play [2]. Games are now linked to social media and streaming platforms to further expand social functionality [3].

Youth Gaming Trends: 2019 - 2024

Youth have adopted digital tools, including internet gaming, at a rapid pace. Research, policy and public discourse has lagged on risks vs. benefits and the mental health implications [4].

- Estimates are that 90% of adolescents play video games [5] most of this gaming (75%) is social in nature [4].
- Although boys traditionally play more, statistics are showing that the gender gap is closing [4].
- Girls are an understudied population who are also at risk for gaming disorder [3, 6].
- The prevalence of internet gaming disorder (IGD) affects approximately about 5.5% of children and youth [5, 7].
- Girls and women are more likely to play casual, simulation and puzzle games [3].
- Boys tend to engage more in competitive, action-oriented, and multiplayer games [4].
- Factors that motivate video game play include escapism and fun, social integration, acquisition of new skills, and strengthening of social networks [2].
- There is evidence that internet gaming can have positive cognitive and social effects, including improved problem-solving skills, teamwork, and strategic thinking [5].
- Risk factors include poor psychosocial functioning and isolation. Particularly with males, depression, ADHD, online gambling, time spent gaming, social and family issues appear to be risk factors for the development of internet gaming addiction [2, 6, 8].

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- Decades of research has not definitively linked violent videogames with future aggressive behaviour in youth. Youth who struggle with their mental health and had physiologic profiles that primed them for aggression struggle more with the effects of violent video games [9, 10].

In summary, gamers who experience relationship difficulties, have family issues, and have underlying mental health issues tend to be at greater risk for problematic gaming.

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