

# The Dangers of Video Game Addiction

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As studies started showing empirical evidence of the existence of non-substance addiction, particularly with the preoccupation of some people with digital games, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders introduced in its fifth edition (DSM-5) that is published in 2013 the Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) as a potential mental disorder. Recently, in June 2018 the World Health Organization (WHO) classified gaming as a disorder due to addictive behavior in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11).

Today, a significant percentage of the population is affected by these new addiction diseases as technology use has invaded almost every household, with no distinction between poor and rich. Alarming, at the level of children, the impact of the rapidly advancing technology on their developing sensory, motor, and attachment systems is devastating, with long-term adverse effect on their physical, psychological, and behavioral health. Furthermore, we are witnessing people of almost all ages get addicted to smartphones, video games (Fortnite, PUBG, Apex Legends, etc.), social media (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, etc.), and even to just texting (WhatsApp). Published studies conducted in several countries found statistically significant associations between addictive or problematic use of technology and comorbid psychiatric disorders (Hawi & Samaha, 2017; Samaha & Hawi, 2016).

In Lebanon, two pioneer research studies were published by Dr. Maya Samaha Rupert and me several months before WHO's classification of digital gaming as a disorder. Given the magnitude of the problem, Dr. Maya Samaha Rupert and I decided to make a scale available to the entire Arab world. We conducted a study that validated an Arabic version of the IGD-20 Test, which is a standardized psychometric tool that assesses the Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) according to the nine IGD criteria put forward by the American Psychiatric Association in the latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). This Arabic version of IGD-20 is intended to help identify Arabic-speaking pathological gamers and stimulate cross-cultural studies that could contribute to an area in need of more research for insight and treatment. Our study titled «Validation of the Arabic version of the Internet Gaming Disorder-20 Test» showed that the Arabic version of the IGD-20 Test is a valid and reliable measure of IGD among Arabic speaking populations. It was published in the prestigious journal «Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking» in 2017.

The next target Dr. Samaha Rupert and I set ourselves was to conduct a research study in Lebanon to determine the prevalence of video gaming, and examine the associations between video gaming and symptoms of psychiatric disorders, demographic factors, depression, anxiety, personality traits, and other comorbidities. The intention of this study was to build a sound evidence-based prevention strategy, propose policy and motivate researchers from Arab countries



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to conduct similar studies. The research study was published in 2018 in collaboration with Dr. Mark Griffiths, titled «Internet gaming disorder in Lebanon: Relationships with age, sleep habits, and academic achievement». This study showed that the pooled prevalence of the video gaming disorder was 9.2% in the sample. Also, it demonstrated that the gaming disorder was associated with being younger, fewer hours of sleep and lower academic achievement. While more casual online gamers also played offline, all the gamers with the gaming disorder reported playing online only. Those with the gaming disorder slept significantly fewer hours per night (5 hours) compared with casual online gamers (7 hours). The academic grades average of gamers with the gaming disorder was the lowest among all groups of gamers, and below the passing average. The aforementioned findings form a partial list of what has been uncovered about this disorder, presenting significant consequences to those suffering from it.

While video games can be great fun for children and adults—teaching players problem solving and logic, managing resources, hand-eye coordination, quick thinking—parents should be aware of which games their kids can play, for how long, at what times, where, with whom, number of in-app purchases, and most importantly engage them in alternative hobbies. It is noteworthy

that the American Psychological Association Task Force on Violent Media concluded that violent video game exposure was linked to increased aggressive behaviors, thoughts and emotions, and decreased empathy. The murders perpetrated by a boy who killed his father and three other people in Zuqaq al-Blat in 2017, the Parkland shooting in Florida in 2018 killing 17 students and staff members, and the Christchurch mosque shootings killing 50 people lead people to question the effects of violent video games.

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