

# Young gamers not more prone to psychiatric disorders

17 September 2020, by Steinar Brandslet



10 and 12-year-olds who had more symptoms of gambling addiction developed fewer symptoms of anxiety two years later. Credit: Shutterstock, NTB scanpix

Many of our children play a lot of computer games. Some youths play so much and develop such substantial problems that a new diagnosis called Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) has been proposed.

A gaming disorder is characterized by causing a variety of problems in a person's personal and [work life](#). It can have an impact on school, work or friendships, and the gamer may continue to play even though he or she knows it is causing

problems. Other symptoms of IGD are that the gamer is unable to stop or reduce the activity, and that the person may lose interest in other activities and lie about how much he or she plays.

Previous findings show that excessive screen use among young [children](#) can lead to them becoming less able to recognize emotions. But some children also experience valuable mastery through gaming, and many find friendship and other social togetherness.

## Less anxiety

A research group at NTNU has looked at possible connections between children with symptoms of IGD and [mental health problems](#). The results may reassure parents who might have been more permissive with digital gaming as they themselves try to work at home during the coronavirus pandemic.

"We've found no connection between IGD and [psychiatric problems](#), other than that 10- and 12-year-olds who had more symptoms of gaming addiction developed fewer symptoms of anxiety two years later, when they were 12 and 14 years old," says Beate Wold Hygen.

She is a postdoctoral fellow at NTNU's Department of Psychology and the first author of a new article in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*.

Yes, children actually develop fewer symptoms of anxiety, not more.

This finding could be related to the social aspects of the [game](#), or it may be that gaming is a distraction that causes children to ruminate less than others.

No inverse relationship has been found.

"We looked at anxiety, depression, ADHD and

oppositional defiant disorder. But children who had more symptoms of these mental disorders were not more susceptible to gaming addiction," says Hygen.

### **Other factors come into play**

"When psychiatric difficulties and IGD occur at the same time, which they do, they must be explained by other shared underlying factors," says Professor Lars Wichstrøm, who is a co-author of the work and leads the research project on which the study is based.

The researchers are not sure exactly what factors come into play, but genes that affect both the tendency to become addicted, including to internet gaming, and having other mental health problems may play a role.

The figures are based on interviews with 702 children from the Trondheim Early Secure Study. These are children who have been followed up with questionnaires, tests, in-depth interviews and observation every other year since they were four years old. Today they are 16-17 years old.

**More information:** Beate Wold Hygen et al. The co-occurrence between symptoms of internet gaming disorder and psychiatric disorders in childhood and adolescence: prospective relations or common causes?, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* (2020). [DOI: 10.1111/jcpp.13289](https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13289)

Provided by Norwegian University of Science and Technology

APA citation: Young gamers not more prone to psychiatric disorders (2020, September 17) retrieved 27 April 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-09-young-gamers-prone-psychiatric-disorders.html>

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