



Valley Youth House

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The Consequences of Video Game Addiction

Video game addiction among children and teens may lead to the development of psychological disorders such as depression, researchers say.

The new study found that children who are more likely to become addicted to video games (which the researchers call "pathological" video gaming) are those who spend a lot of hours playing these games, have trouble fitting in with other kids and are more impulsive than children who are not addicted. Once addicted to video games, children were more likely to become depressed, anxious or have other social phobias. Not surprisingly, children who were hooked on video games also saw their school performance suffer.

"What we've known from other studies is that video gaming addiction looks similar to other addictions. But what wasn't clear was what comes before what. Gaming might be a secondary problem. It might be that kids who are socially awkward, who aren't doing well in school, get depressed and then lose themselves into games. We haven't really known if gaming is important by itself, or what puts kids at risk for becoming addicted," said Douglas A. Gentile, an Associate Professor of Psychology at Iowa State University in Ames.

Not only did the study reveal risk factors for pathological gaming, "the real surprise came from looking at the outcomes, because we had assumed depression might be the real problem," explained Gentile. "But we found that in kids who started gaming pathologically, depression and anxiety got worse. And, when they stopped gaming, the depression lifted. It may be that these disorders [co-exist], but games seem to make the problem worse."

The study included 3,034 children and teens from Singapore; 743 were in 3rd grade, 711 in 4th grade, 916 in 7th grade and 664 in 8th grade. The children came from six primary schools and six secondary schools. Five of the schools participating were all-boys' schools. Almost 2,200 of the study participants were male. The children -- although not their parents or teachers -- were surveyed annually from 2007 through 2009. Eighty-three percent of the study volunteers reported playing video games sometimes, and another 10 percent said they had played video games in the past. The average time spent playing video games was around 20.5 to 22.5 hours a week.

But, Gentile pointed out, "A lot of video gaming isn't the same as an addiction. Some kids can play a lot without having an effect on their lives. It's when you see other areas of your child's life suffer that it may be addiction. Parents might notice that a child doesn't have the same friends any more, or that he's just sitting in his room playing video games all the time. Or, there might be a drop in school performance," he said.

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Quitting Smoking May Improve Personality, Study Suggests

Aside from the well-known health benefits of quitting smoking, new research suggests that people who kick the habit may improve their personalities as well.

Researchers from the University of Missouri found that smoking is a trigger for impulsivity (acting without thinking) and neuroticism (often being emotionally negative and anxious) among adults under the age of 35. Those who stop smoking, however, can lose these unfavorable traits and improve their personality, the study suggested.



In comparing smokers ranging in age from 18 to 35 years with their peers who had quit smoking, the researchers found that the smokers were more impulsive and neurotic. In addition, they noted that young people with higher levels of impulsivity and neuroticism were more likely to engage in detrimental behaviors, such as smoking. The researchers concluded that anti-smoking campaigns targeting smokers' impulsivity might be effective on young adults.

"The data indicate that for some young adults smoking is impulsive," Andrew Littlefield, a Doctoral Student in the Psychology Department at the College of Arts and Science, explained. "That means that 18-year-olds are acting without a lot of forethought and favor immediate rewards over long-term negative consequences. They might say, 'I know smoking is bad for me, but I'm going to do it anyway.' However, we find individuals who show the most decreases in impulsivity also are more likely to quit smoking. If we can target anti-smoking efforts at that impulsivity, it may help the young people stop smoking."

The study, slated for publication in an upcoming issue of the journal *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*, revealed that after quitting, the smokers saw declines in these personality traits; particularly those aged 18 to 25. As smokers age, the authors noted, their reasons for smoking go beyond impulsivity and the habit becomes part of a regular pattern of behavior.

"The motives for smoking later in life -- habit, craving, loss of control and tolerance -- are key elements of smoking dependence and appear to be more independent of personality traits," said Littlefield. However, like other forms of substance abuse, smoking involves a complex relationship of genetic and environmental factors, he noted. Littlefield plans to research this topic further by studying the genetic influences on personality and alcohol consumption.

<http://health.usnews.com/health-news/family-health/brain-and-behavior/articles/2011/09/14/quitting-smoking-may-improve-personality-study-suggests>

High Rates of Smoking Persist in Certain Occupations

Cigarette smoking remains stubbornly high among workers in the mining, food services and construction industries despite dramatic overall declines in the United States in recent decades, a new study showed.

Thirty percent of workers in mining, hotel/motel and food services smoke, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which analyzed data from 2004-2010. The construction industry had the next highest smoking rate at 29.7 percent.

"Since the first surgeon general's report in 1964, we've almost cut the smoking prevalence in half overall," said Ann Malarcher, Senior Scientific Adviser at the CDC. "But then there are groups that are still at very high rates and are being left behind." The management and education sectors had among the lowest percentage of smokers. Only 9.7 percent of educators smoke, according to the study.

Low education levels are a factor in high smoking rates, along with poverty and gender, Malarcher said. "One of the things that has been studied is that persons with lower levels of education tend to have less access to health information," she said. "They tend to be less knowledgeable about the dangers of tobacco use." The CDC survey found the highest smoking rates among workers ages 18-24, males, those with high school or less education and those without health insurance. Midwestern workers had the overall highest rates.

The CDC recommends that employers increase their anti-smoking efforts, including imposing smoke-free workplace policies and providing health insurance coverage for smoking cessation treatments. Adult smoking has decreased 42.4 percent since 1965, the CDC said. But the decline has slowed in the past five years, dropping to 19.3 percent of adults in 2010 from 20.9 percent in 2005.

Smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke is the leading cause of preventable death and disease in the United States, killing an estimated 443,000 Americans each year. Smoking costs about \$193 billion annually in direct health care expenses and lost productivity.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/29/us-usa-smoking-idUSTRE78S60X20110929>



Cocaine Increases Risk for Glaucoma

People who use cocaine are 45 percent more likely to develop open-angle glaucoma, the most common form of the eye disease, according to a new study. The authors said the cocaine abusers who developed the condition were nearly 20 years younger than glaucoma patients who did not do drugs. They suggested that the findings could help doctors develop new treatments for the disease, which is currently the second most common cause of blindness in the United States.

"The association of illegal drug use with open-angle glaucoma requires further study, but if the relationship is confirmed, this understanding could lead to new strategies to prevent vision loss," Dustin French, a Research Scientist with the Center of Excellence on Implementing Evidence-Based Practice at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Indianapolis, said. In conducting the study, published in a recent issue of the *Journal of Glaucoma*, the researchers examined information on 5.3 million men and women seen in Department of Veterans Affairs' outpatient clinics over the course of one year. The study found about 1.5 percent of those patients had glaucoma. Over this same time frame, about 3.3 percent of all those seen in the outpatient clinics had used cocaine.

Although the study does not prove that using cocaine causes glaucoma, the researchers concluded there is significantly higher risk for the eye condition among those with a history of drug abuse, particularly since people are usually in their teens or 20s when they start using illegal drugs. The study's authors noted more research is needed to explore the long-term effects of cocaine use on the development of glaucoma.

<http://consumer.healthday.com/Article.asp?AID=657388>



Interesting Influence on the Drinking Habits of Teens

The drinking habits of the friends of a teen's boyfriend or girlfriend may have more influence on the youngster's drinking than the habits of the teen's own friends or romantic partner. That is the finding of U.S. researchers who analyzed national data collected from 449 heterosexual couples who were in grades 7 to 12 in the mid-1990s.

The study appears in the October issue of the journal *American Sociological Review*. "Dating someone whose friends are big drinkers is more likely to cause an adolescent to engage in dangerous drinking behaviors than are the drinking habits of the adolescent's own friends or romantic partner," said Derek Kreager, an Associate Professor of Crime, Law, and Justice at Pennsylvania State University. "This applies to both binge drinking and drinking frequency." For example, the researchers found that teens whose romantic partner's friends were heavy drinkers were more than twice as likely to binge drink than adolescents with friends or romantic partners who were heavy drinkers.

"The friends of a partner are likely to be very different from the adolescent and his or her friends and they might also be, at least a little, different from the partner," Kreager said. "Adolescents are motivated to be more like their partner's friends in an effort to strengthen their relationship with their partner." But he noted that the influence of a romantic partner's friends is not always negative. "If an adolescent is a drinker and he or she starts going out with someone whose friends predominantly don't drink, you would find the same effect but in the opposite direction," Kreager explained. When educators address drinking behaviors and attitudes, they should give more thought to dating and related influences, Kreager said.

http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_116952.html



Addiction: The New Definition

The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) has released a new definition of addiction highlighting that addiction is a chronic brain disorder and not simply a behavioral problem involving too much alcohol, drugs, gambling or sex. This the first time ASAM has taken an official position that addiction is not solely related to problematic substance use.

When people see compulsive and damaging behaviors in friends or family members—or public figures such as celebrities or politicians—they often focus only on the substance use or behaviors as the problem. However, these outward behaviors are actually manifestations of an underlying disease that involves various areas of the brain, according to the new definition by ASAM, the nation's largest professional society of physicians dedicated to treating and preventing addiction.

"At its core, addiction isn't just a social problem or a moral problem or a criminal problem. It's a brain problem whose behaviors manifest in all these other areas," said Dr. Michael Miller, past president of ASAM who oversaw the development of the new definition. "Many behaviors driven by addiction are real problems and sometimes criminal acts. But the disease is about brains, not drugs. It's about underlying neurology, not outward actions." The new definition resulted from an intensive, four-year process with more than 80 experts actively working on it, including top addiction authorities, addiction medicine clinicians and leading neuroscience researchers from across the country. The full governing board of ASAM and chapter presidents from many states took part, and there was extensive dialogue with the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).

<http://www.prweb.com/releases/2011/8/prweb8657852.htm>

