CORRESPONDENCE

The Prevalence and Psychosocial Correlates of Internet Gaming Disorder

Analysis in a Nationally Representative Sample of 12- to 25-Year-Olds
by Dr. phil. Dipl.-Psych. Lutz Wartberg, PD. Dr. phil. Dipl.-Psych.
Levente Kriston, and Prof. Dr. med. Rainer Thomasius
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Significant Data Available

The authors of the present study (1) estimate the prevalence of Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) among 12- to 25-year-olds in Germany. The authors' results confirm the clinical impression that IGD prevalence is rising, even though diagnostic criteria such as those found in the DSM-5 are not present in the German ICD-10-based system. Despite the methodological limitations mentioned by the authors, they present valuable results.

I would like to add that data on IGD and Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) are available for similar populations, particularly for Asia (for a summary, see [2]). The available studies mainly originate from China, South Korea, India, and Sri Lanka, with prevalences between 1.6% and 20.3% for IAD, although not all probands mainly play. The average IAD prevalence of 6% reported in a meta-analysis of 31 countries (3) is comparable to the 5.7% found in the present study (1), taking into account that IAD represents "mixed consumption" (gaming and other Internet use).

What are the clinical implications arising from the primary analyses of the present study (1)? The target group for prevention services can be better defined and more specific offers can be developed. The awareness of the need for early interventions in affected persons' social environment can be promoted, and possible comorbidities (e. g. emotional disorders) should be treated adequately.

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In Reply:

We would like to thank Professor Maurer for his correspondence about our study on the prevalence of internet gaming disorder (IGD) in 12- to 25-year-olds in Germany (1), which addresses

some interesting aspects. We agree that the implications of the clinical questions mentioned in his correspondence are relevant and discuss them in more detail below.

A better definition of the target group for prevention programs: Our study revealed that IGD is associated with being male and of younger age. In other words, adolescents are more likely than adults, and boys more likely than girls, to be affected by IGD. In our opinion, future preventive measures for IGD should be designed to be age-appropriate and gender-specific (as males and females prefer different types of computer games).

Raising awareness in the environment: Many people affected by IGD are likely to still be living together with their parents when IGD first appears, so that sensitizing their parents to IGD seems to be a promising approach. Parents are therefore also a relevant target group for preventive measures, particularly since they are often also the ones who make the first contact for receiving help.

Sufficient treatment of possible comorbidities: In our examined sample, IGD correlated with higher levels of emotional distress; in a clinical population of affected adolescents, the most common comorbidities were anxiety, depression, and antisocial behavior (2). Therefore, comorbidities should be considered when treating IGD. With respect to future research activities, a better differentiation between problematic Internet use in general („Internet addiction“) or for specific purposes (such as playing computer games or using social media) appears to be useful. Indeed, initial empirical indications show differences in the etiology of IGD and Internet addiction (3), and of IGD and a problematic use of social media (4).

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Conflict of interest statement

The authors of all contributions declare that no conflict of interest exists.