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Video Game Addiction: Is it Real?

Males ages 8 to 18 report feeling "addicted to video games", according to new Harris Interactive survey

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – April 2, 2007 – Reports from around the world suggest that gaming addiction is real and on the rise. Nationally, 8.5 percent of youth gamers (ages 8 to 18) can be classified as pathological or clinically "addicted" to playing video games. Most youth play video games and many feel that they may be playing too much. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of youth say they that have felt "addicted to video games", with about one-third of males (31%) and a little more than one in ten females (13%) feeling "addicted." Forty-four percent of youth also report that their friends are addicted to games. With nearly 8 in 10 American youth (81%) playing video games at least one time per month, including 94 percent of all boys playing, this certainly raises concerns about video game addiction.

These are just some of the results of a new survey of 1,178 U.S. children and teenagers (ages 8 to 18) conducted online by Harris Interactive® between January 17 to 23, 2007. This study is the first to document a national prevalence rate of pathological video game use among youth.

Video game playing time differs by age as well as gender. The average 8- to 12 year-old now plays 13 hours of video games per week, while the average 13- to 18 year old plays 14 hours of video games per week. There are large differences between boys and girls, as tween (those ages 8 to 12) and teen boys average 16 hours and 18 hours per week, respectively. Tween girls average 10 hours per week and teen girls average 8 hours per week. Time matters because 8- to 18-year-olds who spend more time playing video games are more likely to perform more poorly in school, get into physical fights and/or be physically heavier.

Dr. Douglas Gentile, Director of the Media Research Lab at Iowa State University and the director of research for the National Institute on Media and the Family, states, "It is important that people realize that playing a lot is *not* the same thing as pathological play. For something to be an addiction, it has to mean more than you do it a lot. It has to mean that you do it in such a way that it damages your life. This is why we based our definition on how pathological gambling is diagnosed in the DSM-IV. Almost one out of every ten youth gamers show enough symptoms of damage to their school, family, and psychological functioning to merit serious concern."

According to Dr. Suzanne Martin, Youth and Education Researcher at Harris Interactive, "The prevalence of video gaming in youth culture in combination with this level of pathological video gaming is great cause for concern and highlights the need for further research in this arena."

Gamers who were surveyed and classified as pathological were receiving lower grades in schools than their peers, were more likely to have video game systems in their bedrooms (65%), were spending much more time playing games each week (averaging 24.5 hours per week), and were also more likely to have been diagnosed with an attention deficit problem.

Methodology

This survey was designed in collaboration with Psychology professor Douglas Gentile, Ph.D., director of the Media Research Lab at Iowa State University and the director of research for the National Institute on Media and the Family, and was conducted online by Harris Interactive among 1,178 children and teenagers (including 497 tweens ages 8 to 12, and 681 teens ages 13 to 18) within the United States between January 17 to 23, 2007. Some questions were asked to a subset of the total sample. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, parental education, and region were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

All surveys are subject to several sources of error. These include: sampling error (because only a sample of a population is interviewed); measurement error due to question wording and/or question order, deliberately or unintentionally inaccurate responses, nonresponse (including refusals), interviewer effects (when live interviewers are used) and weighting.

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With one exception (sampling error) the magnitude of the errors that result cannot be estimated. There is, therefore, no way to calculate a finite "margin of error" for any survey and the use of these words should be avoided.

With pure probability samples, with 100 percent response rates, it is possible to calculate the probability that the sampling error (but not other sources of error) is not greater than some number. With a pure probability sample of 1,178, one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the overall results have a sampling error of +/-3 percentage points. Sampling error for data based on sub-samples may be higher and may vary. However this does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

About the Harris Interactive Youth and Education Research Practice

The Youth and Education Research Practice conducts research among children, teens, parents, educators, administrators and policy makers that assists in understanding the lives of children, teens and college students. The team specializes in research related to marketing geared toward the young consumer, to public policy related to youth and education, to family and parenting issues, and satisfaction studies and research that measures the standards of K-12 and higher education in districts across the nation. The practice conducts custom and syndicated studies both for non-profit and for-profit organizations.

Downloadable PDF files of previous issues, and the current issue of ***Trends and Tudes***, containing this information and more (to be posted soon), can be found at:
http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_k12.asp.

About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is the 12th largest and fastest-growing market research firm in the world. The company provides innovative research, insights and strategic advice to help its clients make more confident decisions which lead to measurable and enduring improvements in performance. Harris Interactive is widely known for *The Harris Poll*, one of the longest running, independent opinion polls and for pioneering online market research methods. The company has built what it believes to be the world's largest panel of survey respondents, the Harris Poll Online. Harris Interactive serves clients worldwide through its United States, Europe and Asia offices, its wholly-owned subsidiary Novatris in France and through a global network of independent market research firms. The service bureau, HISB, provides its market research industry clients with mixed-mode data collection, panel development services as well as syndicated and tracking research consultation. More information about Harris Interactive may be obtained at www.harrisinteractive.com.

To become a member of the Harris Poll Online and be invited to participate in online surveys, register at www.harrispollonline.com.

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Video Game Addiction

Is it Real?

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This is an article detailing the analysis of a survey conducted on children and teenagers regarding whether or not they play video games, the frequency at which they play, and different factors that may be impacted by their playing video games. The article is written to drive discussion as to whether or not video game addiction exists and gives the opening of a case for each argument, but does not weigh itself heavily toward either side.

I personally do not believe video game addiction is real. I believe that a person with low self control, an incomplete sense of risk vs. reward, low self esteem, or simply too much freedom in their life could exhibit signs of addiction as described in this article. That statement applies to all people, not just teens/pre-teens as the article is focused on. In the cases of teens/pre-teens, I believe the perceived addiction to video games would merely be a symptom of larger problem, with some of the other diagnoses/states listed above as the root cause, or at least lying closer to the root cause than the addiction itself.

Beyond that, with a focus on 8-18 year olds the problem may not lie with the person being surveyed but rather within the environment in which they are raised. When focusing on the behavior of a child/adolescent you must also look at their parents as they are largely responsible for providing governance over the child's activities. The children do not always possess the knowledge and decision making skills required to make good decisions. For example, if an 11 year old boy's favorite thing to eat is chocolate, and his parents allow him to eat only chocolate, he would develop dental/nutritional problems as a result of a poor diet. When that happened, would the child be considered addicted to chocolate, or would he simply be the victim of poor parenting?

Further, I believe the results of this particular survey are skewed further toward children who play video games than the provided disclosures acknowledge as it was conducted entirely online.